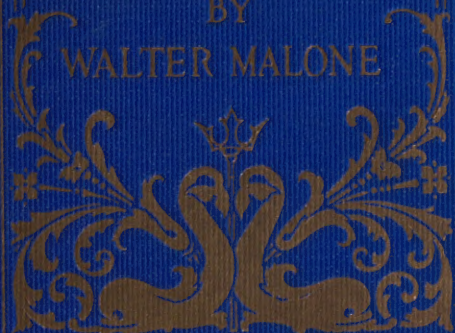


HERNANDO
DE SOTO

BY
WALTER MALONE





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Hernando De Soto

By

Walter Malone



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To

ALEXANDER HARVEY

PREFACE

AMONG all pioneers in the exploitation of the New World, whether Spaniard or Frenchman or Briton, Hernando De Soto has left his impress upon the annals of more of its countries than any other who could be named.

Cortez is connected solely with the story of Mexico; Pizarro is famed only for his venturesome deeds in Darien and Peru; the name of La Salle is never mentioned save in connection with the exploration of the Mississippi Valley.

De Soto is known, like Pizarro, in the history of Darien, or modern Panama. Like Pizarro, also, he is known prominently in connection with the Conquest of Peru. And the Peru of his day included not only Peru as we know it now, but also Ecuador, Bolivia and Chili—in fact, nearly all of the western portion of the South American continent.

But, unlike Pizarro, his exploits do not end there. He is inseparably connected also with the history of the settlements of Nicaragua and Guatemala, and with the earliest explorations of Yucatan.

At still another time he was Governor of Cuba, and as such he will live in her annals.

After Ponce de Leon and Narvaéz, he became the explorer of Florida. So far as we know, he was the first white man to traverse the States of Georgia,

Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri. To these we may add, with great likelihood, North Carolina. It may be that Cabeza de Vaca preceded him in Louisiana, but this is quite doubtful. If, indeed, Ayllon's men had first trod the soil of South Carolina, it was left to De Soto's men to discover their bones, and bring back the story of their fate.

Not only was he the discoverer of the Mississippi, but of the Chattahoochee, the Tennessee, the Alabama, the Tombigbee, the White, the Arkansas, the St. Francis, and the Red rivers, besides a multitude of smaller streams.

He it was who, first of Caucasians, set eyes on the Appalachian and the Ozark ranges, which include all the highlands of importance in the United States east of the Rocky Mountains. All these discoveries he had made forty-five years before Raleigh sent his colonists to Roanoke Island, sixty-five years before the settlement at Jamestown, and seventy-eight years before the Pilgrims disembarked at Plymouth Rock.

One peculiarity of the history of the Southern and South Central States of the Mississippi Valley consists in the fact that though it begins with De Soto, it also ends with him for the time being, to be resumed only after a great hiatus of nearly three hundred years.

Barring the establishment of a few towns near the seacoast, like New Orleans, and the accomplishment of a few expeditions like that of La Salle, those annals, from the discovery of the Mississippi to the early years of the Nineteenth Century, are well-nigh a blank.

On the spot where the Spaniard first beheld the

waters of the Great River, is now a city of nearly two hundred thousand souls; but ninety years ago that city had no existence. The history of Oklahoma begins with De Soto; but Oklahoma was only opened to the civilization of the white man yesterday.

On reading the chronicles of De Soto's expedition, we learn the most intimate facts regarding the peoples inhabiting the South in his era. Their virtues, their faults, their eccentricities, are set out in exact detail. The features of the country are described with such an accurate hand that pioneers yet surviving declare that the picture is a faithful portrayal of the same region in their youthful days. Even trivial details regarding the weather are given, almost with the exactness of an official report, so that we know whether this day or that was rainy, or bright and cheerful.

Then follows a period of unilluminated darkness, without a history, and well-nigh without a tradition.

Looking back to De Soto's time, we are as one who stands upon the foreland of a continent, gazing over the waters at night to a brilliant light on an island far in the distance. The light has illuminated the rock upon which it burns; we can see the billows breaking at the foot of the rock; we can distinguish human beings treading the sands that fringe the narrow isle; but between us and the light itself is a great gulf of darkness, mysterious and profound.

Through this explorer, the history of the Mississippi Valley is connected with the golden years of the Renaissance.

On that memorable day in May, 1541, when De Soto first stood upon the Chickasaw bluffs overlooking the Great Stream, Michelangelo, still persistent and untiring at the labors of his art, was putting the

finishing touches to his *Last Judgment*; he was not to cease his earthly toils till twenty-three years later, in 1564, that illustrious year which also witnessed the birth of Shakespeare, of Christopher Marlowe, and Galileo. Titian was then in the meridian glory of his genius: Martin Luther had five more years to live: Camoens, a youth of seventeen, was not to give his *Lusiad* to the world until more than three decades had passed. Elizabeth, the British Semiramis, was then a light-hearted child of only eight years. Mary Stuart was born the next year, and Henry IV of France twelve years thereafter. Francis Drake—that Robin Hood of the seas, destined to destroy Spanish naval supremacy forever,—was only a prattling infant in his mother's arms. Writers like Spenser and Tasso and Cervantes, philosophers like Bacon, painters like Rubens, explorers like Raleigh, were not to flourish till the next generation. At that time English literature—since attained to such greatness—was adorned by only one star of the first magnitude—Geoffrey Chaucer.

Those great regions at the foot of the Ozarks which to-day, for the first time, the Caucasian is claiming as his own, but which De Soto explored nearly four hundred years ago—those great regions through him find their connecting link between this, the Twentieth Century, and the Sixteenth—between the age just preceding that of Bacon and Galileo, and the era of Marconi and Edison.

It is interesting to note the many points of similarity between these two ages,—probably the two greatest the world has ever seen,—that of De Soto and our own. The years that closed the Fifteenth Century and opened the Sixteenth were brilliant and poetic:

those that closed the Nineteenth and opened the Twentieth seem less romantic and attractive, but their noble achievements are often along the same high planes of endeavor whereon were attained the greatest triumphs of the Renaissance.

That elder age is supreme in the fine arts, the younger in science. But beyond this divergence we find their efforts paralleling each other. And indeed we find the scientific discoveries of Copernicus and Leonardo Da Vinci in that earlier period more important, probably, than those of Bell and Edison in our own day.

We may call one the time of religious upheaval. But if that epoch had its Luther, the other had its Darwin.

We may say that one was emphatically an era of discovery, of exploration and colonization. But with equal emphasis the same assertion may be made of the other. The discovery of America by Columbus has its complement to-day in the discovery of the north and south pole. If one cycle can boast that the route to India was opened in its own day by Vasco Da Gama's circumnavigation of the Cape of Good Hope, the other, with equal pride, can claim that it shortened the same passage by digging the Suez Canal. If the ships of Magellan first doubled Cape Horn in the one, the Isthmus of Panama is first traversed by fleets in the other.

If the first age discovered the Amazon and the Mississippi, it was the privilege of the later to uncover the secret sources of the Congo and the Nile.

If in those early years Spain and Portugal were each struggling for mastery in the western world, seeking through colonization to extend the bounds

of their great American dominions, to-day we find England and France and Germany, and Italy and Belgium as well, colonizing and exploring Africa with a view to divide the whole continent between themselves.

The Spaniard has often been accused of an inordinate thirst for gold as an incentive to his great explorations. But has not this same desire for gold, in our own time, been the impulse which led to the settlement and development of California, of Australia, of South Africa and Alaska? Who can distinguish here between the motives of the Iberian and the Anglo-Saxon?

But the striving after gold, a selfish and debasing thing in itself, has often been the means by which men have achieved higher and better things. How insignificant is the value of all the gold annually mined by California, when compared with the plentiful gifts of her farms, her gardens and her orchards! The gold fields of Australia,—what a trifle is their entire output when matched against the vast wealth arising from the flocks of sheep, the herds of cattle and the fields of grain of that southern continent!

Yet that search for gold was the primary cause leading to the development of those great regions, and it is the primary cause which in the future will make of Alaska and South Africa empires which else had never existed, even in dreams.

These modern adventurers, seeking for apples of gold, have found in the gardens of Hesperides other and more goodly trees, loaded with fruits far sweeter and more satisfying.

De Soto's own career was the first to prove this. He failed in the search for precious metals, but opened

to the world a region whose thousandfold sources of fruitfulness make mean and insignificant those barren wastes that stingily yield their little tribute of silver and gold. The cotton alone, produced in those States which he first traversed, is worth each year more than the entire annual yield of gold by the whole world.

Florida, which claims De Soto as one of her pioneers, is to-day making greater strides than in all the other centuries since his time. Oklahoma, which, as we have already seen, beheld him as the first of white men, has to-day, for the first time, been opened to his race, and in such a marvelous onrush of immigration as the world was a stranger to before.

De Soto's age was in truth like our own, and De Soto was himself a type of the American of to-day,—one ever striding onward, heedless of difficulties, and despairing of nothing as impossible. His one effort is to rear an empire in the wilderness, or failing in the attempt, to leave the work to his successors, who may accomplish the task with less effort, since he has gone before and eased the way.

The dangers, the hardships and the sufferings encountered two hundred and fifty or three hundred years later by pioneers like Daniel Boone and David Crockett, were but repetitions, on a smaller scale, of the fearful difficulties which De Soto met in his day.

Famine, fire, and flood opposed him; every marsh reeked with malaria; every day's journey brought a new scene of warfare; every forest was the seat of an ambuscade; treachery lurked on his right hand and on his left; massacre of his comrades was momentarily expected, and continually becoming a reality.

The inconveniences and privations endured by Lewis and Clark and their companions on the overland march to Oregon, were but as pastime in comparison with those suffered by the intrepid Spaniard and his followers.

Much has been written concerning the hardships to which the gold-hunters of California and the Klondike were subjected. Their pioneer spirit has been made the theme of many a song and story. But their trials seem insignificant when matched against the multitudinous afflictions and obstructions which were encountered by De Soto.

The expedition of Baker, the travels of Livingstone, and the later marches of Stanley through the wilds of Africa, appear like pleasure excursions when contrasted with the achievements of the discoverer of the Mississippi.

In personal character we find De Soto easily superior to the other great Spanish conquerors. He was more humane than Balboa, and when we reflect upon the atrocities of Cortez, the Pizarros, Pedrarias, or Narvaez, we wonder at the magnanimity not rarely displayed by De Soto.

It is true that he was often imperious: it is true that his measures were often severe. But if we estimate him by the era in which destiny placed him, we will again and again be gratified at instances of uprightness and generosity most unusual among his peers.

Let it not be forgotten, besides, that he who deals with savages is often provoked to act savagely himself. Should the white man seek to deal kindly with an

inferior race, he learns soon enough that his leniency is construed as an evidence of weakness. Every act of clemency on his part calls for more exorbitant demands upon his patience.

In making way for the march of civilization, the barbarian must necessarily suffer. Enlightenment comes not with peace, but a sword.

De Soto was not more stern in dealing with the Indian than were the Colonists of Virginia or New England. Nor were the excesses of his soldiers more condemnable than those of some of the allies in China a decade ago. This language of Prescott in *The Conquest of Peru*, written nearly seventy years ago, describes a condition existent in much more recent times:

"There is something in the possession of superior strength most dangerous, in a moral view, to its possessor. Brought in contact with the semi-civilized man, the European, with his endowments and effective force so immeasurably superior, holds him as little higher than the brute, and as born equally for his service. He feels that he has a natural right, as it were, to his obedience, and that this obedience is to be measured, not by the powers of the barbarian, but by the will of his conqueror. Resistance becomes a crime to be washed out only in the blood of the victim. The tale of such atrocities is not confined to the Spaniard. Wherever the civilized man and the savage have come in contact, in the East or in the West, the story has been too often written in blood."

I have called De Soto, I think justly, the King of Pioneers. The story of his life is an Epic of Civilization.

True, it undeniably is, that if he had his infirmities,

all other idols, ancient or modern, have had feet of clay. All popular heroes have been mythologized: their shortcomings have been concealed or condoned or denied. Beneath the adulations of countless multitudes, their earthly connections have been obliterated, like the feet of that Roman statue, which, though wrought of bronze, through century after century have melted away under myriadfold kisses from the lips of the faithful.

One hindrance experienced in an attempt to place before a reader the surroundings of De Soto in his adventurous career consists in the fact that the world wherein his part was played is a world that has well-nigh passed away.

Few travelers would detect in the sordid and commonplace environments of modern Panama any traces of that virgin paradise which the early Spaniards beheld in bygone Darien. The wayfarer in Peru would search uselessly to-day for any adequate memorial of the unique and picturesque civilization of the Incas.

If we pause to realize the changes that have taken place in the aspects of those regions of our own country over which De Soto wandered, we shall be not less startled at the transformation. Not only has the white race supplanted the red: not only has there arisen a new language and a new religion; but the very expression of nature itself has changed. The sublime primeval forest has well-nigh become only a memory. The region immediately south of the point where De Soto discovered the Great River was in his day a land of running waters. To-day in that

whole tract there is hardly a stream which runs throughout the year. Forests and watercourses have passed away together.

The vast herds of bison which roamed the prairies west of the Mississippi in legions more multitudinous than the numberless hosts of Xerxes, have dwindled to scanty groups of stragglers whose very existence is momentarily threatened, and whose extinction to-morrow would be a certainty save for rigid protection of the strictest laws.

The immense flocks of wild pigeons, whose innumerable flying cloud-squadrons darkened the sun for hours in passing, are remembered by but a few old men and women whose final summons has only been delayed through some caprice of fate. The great throngs of Carolina parrots which laid waste the Indian's cornfields, and which the pioneer farmer sought to exterminate like so many swarms of locusts, are only to be seen in little remnants, and then but rarely, in the remotest and most inaccessible swamps of Florida, and possibly of Louisiana.

So far as the features of Nature herself are considered, the England of Chaucer is the England of to-day. Barring changes among men themselves, the France of Villon is the France of the Twentieth Century. But he who would know the America of De Soto's pathway must seek it only in the realms of historical memory.

And let no one overlook the fact that a study of the great and varied aspects of Nature in the lands conquered or explored by De Soto is essential to a true understanding of his career. References to them are not merely agreeable diversions: a consideration of them constitutes no digression from the chronicle

itself. In describing them, a writer is not luring his reader into a by-path; he is guiding him into the very footsteps of De Soto himself.

As the sands of the Sahara and the currents of the Niger blended with the lives of Caillie and Mungo Park; as the miasma of the mid-African jungle became a part of the life-breath of Livingstone; as the polar snow and ice mingled into the very existence of Arctic explorers like Greeley or Peary,—so the terrors, the beauties, the fascinations and deadly dangers of the untrodden American wilderness are interwoven for all time with the story of Hernando De Soto.

Strange it is, that while so many epics, so many lyrics, so many romances, have been written concerning the strife of man with his fellow-man, his more constant and more trying conflict with the common antagonist of all humanity—Nature—has only been lightly touched upon in prose or verse. Yet in that conflict his greatest battles have been fought, his most heartbreaking defeats have been encountered, and his noblest victories have been achieved.

Bards and historians alike have celebrated loudly the triumphs of Hannibal and Napoleon over men like themselves. Their conquest of the Alps is reserved for pæans less exultant. Yet we know that the great Corsican, before whom the Russian battalions could not stand, was himself driven in hopeless defeat before the rigors of the Russian winter.

And the contest with Nature is one which all must face; it is inevitable; it is unavoidable; it is one that, from the cradle to the coffin, ceases not. We may live in peace with our neighbors; or we may contend with them, grow weary of strife, and agree to an armistice. But with Nature we can never negotiate

a truce; between us there can be no cessation of hostilities.

While in civilized life we may be dimly conscious of this great conflict going on around us, to the pioneer who nakedly must confront Nature as a foe armed with all the barbaric power of an unshorn Samson, the struggle is far more imminent and appalling.

And so in the life of a pioneer like De Soto, the fight against Nature is no mere episode, no passing phase of his mission. It is the beginning, the middle and the end of all his labors.

If his fate leads him, like the gold-seeker of Alaska, into Arctic realms, the nine-months winter is an enemy to be reckoned with, though the scowls of unfriendly Esquimaux he may overlook or despise. If he is a wayfarer through the desert, he learns to dread the sirocco and the sand-whirlwind more than the Bedouin horde.

If his path, like that of De Soto, lies through the tropical forest, he will encounter in the earthquake, the volcano, the hurricane, the tangled swamp, the raging flood, the serpent and wild beast, pestilence and famine, adversaries more terrible than savage bands. This the life of the discoverer of the Great River has demonstrated. For he who overcame the barbarian in an hundred hand-to-hand conflicts, sank as a martyr at last before the more insidious agencies of death that swarmed unseen on the tainted air of the vast marshes of the Mississippi.

The changes in the face of Nature herself, already adverted to, are not more remarkable than the changes in the human tribes encountered by De Soto on his marches.

He whose idea of those people is fashioned after the Indian depicted on some cheap vaudeville stage,—a stolid, sullen, blanketed creature, coarse and repulsive, croaking only in monosyllables,—is imagining a race at the very opposite pole from those impulsive beings whose eloquence in expression and heroism in action are so vividly portrayed by the chroniclers of De Soto's last expedition.

And even to judge those people by living savages of the western plains, roaming two thousand miles away, four hundred years afterward, when those savages, dispirited from uncounted defeats, are, we may say, not even themselves any longer,—is not this like judging the Egyptian in his prime by the Egyptian of to-day?

The Portuguese Gentleman, whose narrative, veracious to a painstaking degree, is evidently based upon memoranda made from day to day, records, *verbatim*, numerous graceful and spirited addresses of the native chiefs to the Spanish leader. He and the other chroniclers, personal witnesses to the facts, in numberless instances show that these natives, instead of being the taciturn and sluggish-minded churls of popular fancy, were open-hearted and emotional to a degree unknown among races more pretentious. The barbaric eloquence of chiefs like Logan was no rarity among the chiefs of De Soto's time.

Many travelers like Bartram, who roved among those Indians in later centuries, while conceding their fierceness when aroused, never fail to yield tribute to their virtues on brighter occasions,—the generous and lofty nobility of the men, the sweet and gentle delicacy of the women.

Besides this, Bartram brings many convincing

proofs to show that these tribes had approached much nearer to civilization in other centuries than his own, —the Eighteenth. In this opinion he is corroborated through most abundant evidence adduced by that scholarly Georgian, Charles C. Jones, whose researches, among those of all Southern archæologists, have been the most thoughtful and careful.

I am wide awake, of course, to the fact that the present era is considered an unpropitious one for all forms of verse. I am likewise thoroughly aroused to the popular belief that at this time an attempt to construct a poem of any length is an exhibition of temerity.

But the mere passing foibles and fashions of a day need not be seriously considered by any one who writes with the slightest degree of earnestness. It is inconceivable that forms of literary expression which have been esteemed for over three thousand years could be outlawed by the volatile caprice of a moment. That which has been in favor heretofore will be in favor hereafter. The whole matter can be expressed in a single sentence: *Whatever has been once will be again.*

If this work should meet with the approbation of the few whose judgment I really esteem, I would be content. And contentment is happiness without wings.

W. M.

Part I

BOOK I

Hernando De Soto, and his cavaliers, having arrived in the kingdom of the Chickasaws, pitch their camp for the winter—The snow storm—The Spanish camp and its fortifications—De Soto's tent—The Chief of the Chickasaws visits De Soto—De Soto's officers—Lulla, the daughter of the Chief—The Chief's narrative, and the history of his tribe—The boundaries of the Chickasaws—Chactas and Chicsa—The sacred pole and the dog—Arrival at the Mississippi, where the dog is drowned—The white giants, and the great beasts they enslaved—Battles between the giants—The making of the prairies—Destruction of the giants and their beasts by the Great Spirit—Disappearance of the last and mightiest of the brutes beyond the Mississippi.

THE snows were thickly falling. Hills and plains, Woods, brakes and fields, were garmented in white.

From leaden skies great flakes came fluttering down,
Till Earth seemed lost in fleeting clouds of heaven;
Through shivering branches of the haggard trees
They curved and quivered in ecstatic swirls,
Snatching the dead leaves from their blackened stems
And driving them in derision through the sky.
The brook below the hill was hid: the path
That ran beside it seemed a vanished dream.
The forest in the distance first grew dim,
Then was concealed in misty veils of white.
Men's eyes were blinded by the pelting flakes;
Their breath was stifled by the freezing blast.

Yet as in mockery of dead summer days,
Earth seemed to swarm with spotless butterflies;
From withered arms of vulgar wayside weeds
Hung pallid clusters of aerial blooms;
And thorn-trees, bristling like the porcupine,
Grew downy as the bosom of a swan.

Two days before, at noon, the storm began:
Without surcease, till dusk it raged. Keen winds
Whistled more keenly as the twilight fell,
And all men hoped that the relentless blast,
Sweeping the heavens, would leave unclouded stars.
Throughout that night thin fell the flakes and rare,
But morning brought new clouds and heavier snows.
All day the white wings flitted through the air
In whirling spirals, round and round above,
Resting awhile, then whirling on again,
Like ghostly doves from tomblands of the dead.
All night the winds and silent snowflakes wove
A shroud to fold the corpse-like earth. At last
This day had come—but come with no relief!
The third night now was falling; yet on high
The barbarous tempest swept in fury still,
And everywhere was nothing seen but snow.

Here in the country of the Chickasaws
De Soto lingered, exiled, far from home,
Defeated, baffled, bound he knew not where,
Yet in his lone heart ever cherishing
The dark, deserted nest, whence, long ago,
Had flitted all his darling hopes and dreams.
Now at the advent of this eventide,
Threading with painful steps the drifted fields
To gain his tent, and rest beside its fires,

Backward he turned, and saw keen-pointed lights
From wigwams in the little Indian town,
Twinkling through falling snows. Deeply he sighed,
For never might he glimpse on earth again
The welcome lights of home! Instead, he gazed
On alien wilds, in desolation such
As fills the wanderer's bosom with despair.

That morning through the Indian town his feet
Had sauntered aimlessly. There had he seen
A hoary patriarch of the savages,
Who, shivering as he hugged a scanty fire,
Fretfully muttered, "Though my head is bowed
From ninety snow-moons—grayest of the gray
Among our elders,—never have I known
A winter half so bleak."² His ancient squaw,
Wringing her bony hands above the flames,
Mumbled, "No, no; nor shalt thou see its like,
Though twice as many winters yet are yours."

O, what a sequel to his golden dreams;
To what a climax had his drama come!
Where now the palms of Cuba? Where, O where,
The fruits and flowers of tropic Darien?
Where now the gold and silver of Peru,
The mellow dusk of Cuzco's gilded halls?
Where now the Andalusian orange groves,
The dear gray towers of Cadiz? Where had fled
The glamour and romance, the chivalry,
The pomp and splendor of the court of Spain?
All, all had vanished! Had he been content,
Love, gold and glory still had been his own.
Now he was seeking El Dorado! Where,
And when, O when, should that dear dream come true?

When should he see that kingdom of delight,
Its gardens, green with everlasting spring,
And crowned with palace-domes of glittering gold?
His locks were frosted now with gray; his eye,
Clear as the falcon's once, was growing dim.
What had he reaped in all his hard career
But curses of the savages, whose realms
Had paid him tribute of enslaved or slain?
He looked around him, and the answer came,—
His hopes lay shrouded in this land of snow.

Around the Spanish tents, a barricade
Of earthworks and of heavy logs arose,
Surmounted by the brushy limbs of trees,
And girded by a flooded moat. At north,
South, east and west, four lofty towers arose,
Where, night and day, on watch four sentries stood,
Alert for every danger. From the walls,
Like eyes of basilisks whose glance is death,
An hundred loopholes glared: through these, the troops,
Hidden themselves, with ease might spy their foes,
And sweep them with a murderous fire. A bridge
Of three stout beams before the fortress gate
Spanned the wide moat by day; but every night
The beams were drawn within. Of massive oak
The gate was wrought; not poised to swing ajar,
It slid right or left to open or close.
Great bars of iron, firmly riveted,
Were plated on it like a steely coat
Of armor. Fronting it within the close,
De Soto's ample tent upreared. A hearth
Of pebbled clay, set in a log-built wall,
Made snug and warm his lodgings. In the rear
Were quartered all his officers. Beyond,

Like pigmy hillocks rose three hundred huts,
Fashioned of mud and thatched with straw. In these,
The peasant soldiers and their Indian slaves,
Sleeping on skins of wild beasts, numb with cold,
Huddled for warmth together. Further back,
In brushwood stalls were gathered all the steeds,
Whinnying and neighing through the freezing night.
Last, near the wall, a noisy herd of swine³
Packed shuddering in their beds of withered leaves.

Over the entrance to De Soto's tent
A rope extended; from the midst was hung
The black and shaggy carcass of a bear:
There likewise, powdered white with falling snows,
Were dangling three wild turkeys, many hares,
Two fat opossums, and a fine young stag.
Within, the blazing hearth spread warmth and cheer,
And flooded every nook with ruddy light.
One might behold a castle in the fires,
With walls of opal and of amethyst,
And gates of garnet; wildly splendid,
With rubies and with sapphires turreted,
With flames like flaunting pennons high in air,
The lambent conflagration streamed and soared,
Transcending oriental brilliancy
Of magic mansions in Arabian dreams.
About the floor were scattered rugs from Spain,
With hides of panthers, skins of ragged wolves,
And silken furs of otters. At one side,
A suit of armor like a skeleton
Stood upright, with the flames upon its steel
Fitfully gleaming. A cutlass by the hearth
Displayed its slender curve; against the wall
Some fowling pieces and a musket leaned.

Two swords in brazen scabbards hung above
The rude oak mantel. On the hilt of one
Was manifest that cunning workmanship
Which proved it wrought in far Damascus, where
The Abana and Pharpar, clear and cool,
Come gushing through the desert: like a charm,
Its presence in these western wilds recalled
Memories of songs of bulbuls, frankincense,
Of Persian roses and Sabæan sweets,
Of gardens of the olive, date and fig,
And many a green and gladsome paradise
Around the oldest city of the world.
Another came from blest Toledo,—ah!
Who could forget Toledo's happy walls
Among the vineyards and the chestnut groves?
When would these wanderers see its spires again?

Halberds and morions, lances, bows and arrows,
Glimmered around the walls; and above these,
With its emblazoned red and yellow hues
Distained and dark from many a battle, yet
Like the resplendent Spirit of Romance,
Of Chivalry and Honor still, was flung
The glorious banner of all-conquering Spain.

The chief of Chickasaws upon this eve
Had come to see De Soto, and had brought
His youthful daughter with him—riding there
Upon a steed the Spanish lord himself
Had sent him as a gift that very day.
And here to meet the chief were gathered round
The noble Spaniard's trusted officers.
A true hidalgo in his princely bearing,
De Soto stood, dictator over all,

Strong, daring and imperious, yet not slow
To win another's heart or yield his own.
But now the two-score autumns he had known
Had left him careworn far beyond his years;
His lofty brow was wrinkled; in his beard
Were strands of silver thridding through the brown.
Upon his haughty face a wistful glance
Would whisper ever of some deep regret
For something lost, for something never found,—
A longing after some elusive dream
Far in the distance of the desert sands
Of his life's journey, sweet, but unattained,—
Oasis or mirage, ah! who could tell?

Moscoso next in rank and prestige came;⁴
Soft was his air, and gentle; slight and frail,
His limbs seemed unaccustomed to the task
Of stress and struggle through forest, field and flood,
Or battles with the savage; indolence
Sunned in his easy portance. Men would smile
To mark him slowly stroke his yellow beard
Caressingly and lazily. But still
His speech was firm, his glance direct, and all
His bearing proved indifference unto peril.
Baltasar De Gallegos, next in rank,
Fierce with his black and bushy hair and beard,—
His visage hacked and hewn with sabre-cuts,—
His short, stout body rearing like a bear's,—
Might well have awed a stranger; but his eyes
Were gentle; in their gleams of kindliness
One read the goodness of a rugged heart.
He said but little; spoke in guttural tones;
Though ever ready when the leader called,
To wiser heads he left all plans and schemes.

Juan De Anasco, spare-made, sandy-haired,
Seemed cunning and secretive: smooth of speech,
With apt, well-ordered phrases, all the while
He talked, his cat-like glances busily
Went searching every face. Beside him sat
Juan Ortiz, beardless and imbrowned; his face
And hands and wrists were tattooed: from his friends
Greatly he differed. To a stranger's eyes
Half Christian, half barbarian, he seemed.
A kinsman of De Soto was the next,—
Alonzo Romo, youngest of them all,
A splendid giant charged with force and power.
While others spoke with freedom, he alone
Was silent, as became a duteous lad.
His downy cheek, as soft as any boy's,
His modest lowered eyes, proclaimed his youth:
Yet he was the tallest of the Spanish host;
Firmest and stoutest were his mighty limbs;
Like condor's talons seemed his great wide hands;
His big broad feet appeared to grip the ground:
No man could stand the hammering of those fists,
Nor shake the stronghold of those sturdy feet!

Grave Micalusa, chief of Chickasaws,
Bore well the burden of his four-score years.
Deep-chested, broad of shoulder, strong of limb,
With eye still bright, head carried still erect,
One felt assured on glancing in his face
His morns of youth had all been temperate,
His manhood careful of its strength and power,
And all his days devoid of all excess.
Robed head to foot in buckskin, with a cloak
Of skins of beavers, and a lordly crest
Of eagle plumes above his stately brow,

No Roman emperor of the days of old
In majesty surpassed him. At his feet
His little daughter crouched, her arms and chin
Resting upon his knees. A childish maid
Of scarcely sixteen years, one might perceive
The old man's heart she swayed alone. With pride
His hand would smooth her crimson red-bird crest,
Or gently fondle through her loosened hair
That fell far blacker than a moonless night.
Her liquid black eyes, under jetty brows,
Were like dark pools fringed round with dusky ferns,
Making twin mirrors for the twilight stars:
Her hands and feet, slender and delicate,
Were graceful as the petals of a flower.
Her glance was cunning, and her smile was arch,
And all her movements subtle and as swift
As glimmerings of the fleet limbs of a fawn.
"I should have bidden her to stay at home,"
The old man, glancing at her, said: "this night
Is too tempestuous for her,—yea indeed,
Too stormy even for me. And she should make
Her bedtime with the birds, not lingering late
To hear her elders talk. But in these days
Our children rule us. When my gracious lord
Had given me a steed, she, who had never
In all her lifetime seen a horse before,
Pleaded and begged so long and earnestly
To come with me, that I was forced to yield.
So, seating her behind me on the steed,
We rode together from our wigwam here."

After a pause the old man's aspect fell;
His voice grew husky, and his words came slow:
"Her name is Lulla. Youngest of my race,

Child of my old age, she is last of all
The happy household that I once called mine.
I had four elder daughters, blooming girls:
All perished in one summer's pestilence.
Six glorious sons I had: a bloody war
Between us and our kinsmen Choctaws raged,—
Ah, Sire, when brothers strive with brothers, then,
And only then, war's horrors reach their height!
Soon in three battles fell my six brave lads.
But still I had my squaw, and this my child,
Then but a babe in arms. One day the foe
Stole to my wigwam, battered down the door,
Butchered my spouse, and set the lodge on fire.
Too late I came to save my faithful wife,
But not too late for vengeance! Rushing up,
Three villains with my tomahawk I smote;
My comrades' arrows soon transfixed the others.
My bleeding mate I took upon my breast:
Dying, she struggled madly, crying, 'Go!
See, see, our wigwam flames! Our child, our child!
I hid the pappoose when the Choctaws came,
Under the bearskin by the couch. Quick, quick,
Leave me, and save her.' Turning hurriedly,
I speeded through the doorway, seized the child,
And dashed without again; just then the roof,
Enwrapped in flames, crashing like thunder, fell,
Grazing my flying heels. Quickly I sought
My squaw again, but,—” here he paused, and sighed.
“So then I reared the child alone, and both
Father and mother have I been to her
From that day unto this.”

The old man ceased.

A sudden silence fell. Without, they heard

Swishing of falling snows, moans of wild winds,
And howling of the wolves through trackless woods.

Then by and by, De Soto said, "O Sire,
Pleased would we be to learn the history
Of this, thy tribe; the lore of ancient years
Thou knowest: so, I pray thee, let us hear."
The chief, of all the forest lords that yet
The Christians had beheld, surpassed afar
In knowledge and in wisdom. After years
Spent with the natives, each Hispanic knight
Had learned the red-man's language well; so now,
With aid from Ortiz, the interpreter,
At little intervals required, the sage
In measured accents gave the narrative
Through Chickasaw traditions handed down:⁵

My gracious lord, there are two kindred clans,
Choctaw and Chickasaw, which rule this land.
The Choctaws hold the region to the South,
Scarce one day's journey hence,—a goodly realm,
With generous fields of corn, with hunting-grounds
That teem with game, and rivers that abound
With fish and waterfowl. North of their land,
The Chickasaws, my people, claim the soil.
This realm is bounded westward by a stream,
The longest of all earthly rivers, called
The Mississippi: that name signifies
"Father of Waters" in our native speech.⁶
There is a river called the Tennessee,
A stately stream, which, circling from the east,
Turns northward, undulating many a league
From depth to depth of tangled wilderness,
Marking our frontiers with northeastern tribes,
And mingles with another lordly stream

Called the Ohio; this unites at last
With that great stream which bounds us on the west.
The river called Tombigbee, which thy host
Forded in marching hitherward, confines
Our nation on the east.

Hither fared our tribe
From far-off kingdoms of the setting sun.
Uncounted ages since that time have passed;
How many, ask you? Who can number them?
Go out to yonder snowstorm; count the flakes;
Then may you count the moons that have waned
since then!

There were two brothers, Chactas and Chicsa called,
Whence come the names Choctaw and Chickasaw.
Resplendent were they, like twin morning stars,
Celestial heralds of the rising sun,
That lightly tread before him, hand in hand,
The jeweled highway of the Zodiac.
The brothers started eastward with their clans,
And traveled over mountains, lakes and plains,
A thousand leagues. Throughout their pilgrimage,
A sacred pole they carried; every night
Loosely the pole was driven into the ground:
Each morning on their route, they watched the pole,
To note the way it bended after night:
For long, long moons toward the rising sun
It turned, but never to the setting sun,
And never upward to the sun of noon.

A giant dog, white as the winter snows
Under a full moon, strode before the band,
Guiding it through the trackless wilderness
Unerringly. One day they climbed a mound,—

Lone monument of some long-perished race
Left in those gloomy woodland solitudes,—
And looking eastward, lo! they spied afar
In the blue distance, like the crescent moon
In the blue depths of heaven at eventide,
The Mississippi's gleaming curve. The dog,
Yelping and baying joyfully, sped on,
Faster then ever, leading them. Ere long
They reached the river; into its rolling flood
Plunged the beast headlong. But as some brave
soul,

A humble warrior of the ranks, outstrips
The swiftest and most valiant of his tribe,
Scaling before them all the barricade
Where lurks the foe, and leads to victory,
But falls in the hour of triumph, sharing not
The sweets of conquest with those following him,—
So this poor brute, this dumb and faithful guide,
Died with the goal in sight. For the strong dog,
Fighting against the currents desperately,
And struggling to stem the eddies, was at last
In a great whirlpool sucked away, and lost
Forever to the anxious multitudes
Frantically calling to him from the shore.
Long did they mourn him; but his honest face
And welcome bark were never more to be
Their comfort on the way. They crossed the stream,
The pole still turning downward, till they passed
The place where now we bide. Still further on,
Some three-days' journey hence, the magic pole
Stood upright, bending neither east nor west,
Nor north, nor south, but pointing rigidly
Toward the sun of noon. So they halted there.
The region where they ceased their onward march

The tribes named Alabama;⁷ this they tell,
In ancient Chickasaw means, Here we rest.

In those old bygone days, a giant race
Were found to be the masters of this realm;
Nahonla was the name that people bore,
And they had wandered to this land in years
Still further in the past, leaving their homes
In a strange kingdom eastward far away,
Where the bright sun of morning from the ground
Springs to disperse the darkness of the world.
Great hairy monsters were they, fair of face,—
Paler than any light-haired youth in all
Thine armed host, and yet so vast in frame,
When stalking by, they seemed gigantic hills,
By some tremendous power made alive.
They warred with one another: there the ground
Was rent as by an earthquake; for their hands
In rage would pluck the forests, lift the hills,
And hurl them, frightful weapons, upon their foes.
The victors of the battle, merciless,
Like panthers raging above their helpless prey,
Would clutch their captives with terrific screams,
Horribly rejoicing. Trenches deep and wide
They digged, and heaping logs within them, set
The gathered wood on fire: their prisoners then
With dreadful glee they slew, tossing them all
Into the raging flames. In wild uproar,
Dancing and singing like the imps of hell,
And reveling in the fumes accurst, all night
The cannibals feasted on their slaughtered foes.

And in those days, the beasts were not as those
Treading about us now: great creatures lived

Under whose feet the solid ground itself
Trembled as though it thundered. Of these creatures,
The greatest was a brute of fearful shape,⁸
Vast in his girth, prodigious in his height.
His thick, tough hide, of sombre, rusty brown,
Was loosely hung in heavy, flabby folds,
Shaggy with strands of meager ragged fur,
While from his neck and shoulders hung a mane
In tawny tatters of coarse and straggling hairs.
From his deep jaws two sharp white tusks emerged,
Curved like yon cutlass, longer than yon sword,
And swaying between those tusks, a long black snout
Reached wellnigh to the ground. These frightful brutes
The giants had ensnared, and trained for slaves,
As we enslave the dog, and you the horse.
Big were their legs, like blackened upright logs,
With flat round feet that trampled into the dust
All things they trod upon. Their giant lords
Set them to work, felling the forest-trees
That overspread this land; on would they stride,
Stamping the tender saplings underfoot,
Or with their ponderous shoulders pushing down
Trees of a huger girth: or, throwing out
Their serpentine proboscis coils, they clasped
Colossal boles in a tremendous grip,
And twisting and tugging till the roots snapped,
And the tall forest monarchs creaked and groaned,
They lifted up the tower-like trunks in air,
And flung them, reeling and whirling, to the ground.
Great was the crashing of gigantic limbs,
That roared and thundered as they struck the sod,
And over all arose the trumpetings
Those hideous creatures made in beastly joy
To scatter wreck and ruin in their path!

Thus many forests disappeared; and thus
The grassy green of the prairies first was known.

The giants slew our people year by year,
Till only a remnant had escaped: our clan
Seemed doomed to perish from the living world.
A few survivors fled to gloomy swamps,
Or hid in caverns by the banks of streams,
Sleeping by day, and only venturing out
At nightfall. Oft the giants, stalking by
Mountainous in their height, would overlook
The pigmies that around their mighty feet
Scampered in terror like a throng of mice,
Frantically seeking for a hiding-place.
But the Great Spirit loved the little men,
Since they had served him faithfully; and wroth
To see them butchered by such ruthless foes,
He smote the monsters for their wickedness,
Sending a plague to sweep them from the world.
Morn, noon and night, the giants drooped and
died;
Their awful groans were heard from hill to hill,
Like rumbling echoes of a thunderstorm.
Often the monsters in delirium
Wandered the plains howling; and oftentimes,
Maddened with feverish thirst, they drank whole
streams
Dry to their pebbly beds. Often in throngs,
Rabid with anguish, rushing through the woods,
They wrenched and uprooted and hurled the trees
down,
Making great forests melt before their rage,
As though a dreadful hurricane had passed
And smitten the lofty heaven-ascending boughs,

Till the earth bristled like a frightened beast
With splintered wreckage wildly scattered round.
The plains heaved with enormous carcasses
In foul and bloated hillocks: through the skies,
From north and south and east and west, great flocks
Of vultures gathered to the loathsome feast,
And sweeping in a vast black cloud, they hid
The sun in heaven, making a night of noon.

Then the Great Spirit with his thunderbolts
Smote all the brutes the giants had enslaved,
Save one black creature of prodigious bulk,
The dreaded leader of their herd: beside
The old Tombigbee river he remained,
Defying heaven to drive him from his home.
Terrific thunderbolts the Spirit hurled,
But the old beast would quickly bow his head,
Which, harder than a mountain-peak of flint,
Received the awful shock, nor suffered harm.
For scores of years this war continued; then
The stubborn creature, weary of the fight,
Strode northward: on the bluffs of Chickasaw,
Facing the sunset, while below him surged
The Mississippi's floods of ruddy gold,
He loomed gigantic, all alone. And there,
Swaying his great proboscis to and fro,
He stood, as though in meditation lost,
Weighing the destiny of all the world.
But the light faded. As the flaming sun
Vanished in sorrow from the blood-red sky,
Down from the height he stalked, leaped into the
waves,
And like a great sea-monster, buffeting
The roaring billows, swam the mighty stream;

Then facing still the last faint gleam of day,
He sought the west with course inflexible,
And mingling with the shadows of the night,
From the eyes of men forever disappeared.

BOOK II

Lulla questions Ortiz, but is rebuked by her father—Ortiz is then requested to tell of his past life; so he begins his Narrative—His boyhood in Seville—He longs to go to sea—His meeting with the sailor, and his flight from home—He joins the expedition of Narvaez to Florida—With three companions he is taken prisoner by the savages—He is told of the cruelty of Narvaez—The Chief Ucita—His mother is murdered, and he himself is frightfully mutilated by Narvaez—Narvaez and his companions are driven from the land—They venture out to sea and are drowned—Ucita then swears vengeance on all Spaniards falling into his hands—Murder of Ortiz's three companions, Sebastian Lopez, Diego Valdez and Pedro Miranda—The daughter of the chief—She rescues Ortiz from death.

HE ceased, and all was quiet for a space.
Then Lulla, turning to Ortiz suddenly,
Asked him, "How is it that thy cheeks are tanned
Like those of our own warriors? See! Thy hands
And face are tattooed: art thou of our race?"
The Spaniards broke into laughter at this speech
From one expected to sit still and hear,
And be herself unheard. Her father turned
Frowning upon her: "Silence, girl!" he cried;
"Thy childish prattle vexes us. Be still."
And as a little bird in springtime boughs,
Thrilling with youth and joyance, lifts her voice,
And sings a few gay notes, then smitten with fright,
Suddenly ceases her song, and flutters back,

Hiding among the leaves when a rude hand
Flings a stone at her,—so at this rebuke,
Crouching and cowering by her father's knee,
Lulla, abashed and frightened, hung her head,
Nor dared to speak again. De Soto smiled,
Saying to Micalusa: "Chide her not:
The little maid hath given no offense.
And truly shouldst thou hear this worthy man
Reveal the annals of his bygone life;
His story is a strange one: shouldst thou wish
To hear him, he will honor thy command."
The forest emperor nodded with a smile,
And Ortiz then his narrative began:⁹

Juan Ortiz is my name, and I was born
In old Seville, beyond the seas in Spain.
Ah, dear Seville! I seem to see her still,
Peaceful and plenteous and delectable,
Embosomed in delicious orange groves,
In orchards of the peach and apricot,
In vineyards of the purple grapes and gold,
And gardens of the melon and the fig.

When but a boy I chanced to read a book
Telling fine stories of this strange new world:
Those legends haunted me through all the day,
And all the night they robbed me of my sleep.
My father, though a gentleman, was poor,
With little but a name to leave me: so
He planned for me (for he was worldly-wise),
A dull existence at a prosy trade.
He and my mother marked with deep concern
My absent manner and distracted air:
They saw me day by day neglect my tasks,

And wander like a being lost in dreams.
They chided, coaxed and threatened; often with tears
They begged me hearken to their sage advice;
But all in vain; within mine eager ears
I heard the far-off murmur of the seas,
Like distant trumpets calling me to come.

One day a barefoot sailor passing by,
Laid hand upon my arm persuasively,
And begged a coin to buy some little food;
He wore bright earrings, and around his head
Was wrapped a red-and-yellow handkerchief.
Boy-like, I yielded all my tiny hoard,
And asked him whence he came? And whither
bound?

Then proud to find an audience, he began
A long narration of his wandering life:
His bark had touched all shores, had sailed all seas,
Dropped anchor in all harbors known to men.
With stout Columbus had he braved the deep
On that First Voyage, famed throughout the world,
And destined unto fame forever more.

What tales he told of wonders on the seas,
Of marvels in the far-off foreign lands!
While hearkening to him I could see the palms
Lift verdant plumage on the tropic strands
Beside the seas of sapphire; and I saw
The peaks of snow forever pure and white
Above the tropic woods forever green.
I saw the monstrous vine with blood-red blooms,
The green-and-golden parrot on his bough,
The jaguar as he glided from his lair,
The painted red man as he went to war.

I trod on beaches where the sands were gold,
By rivers where the pebbles all were gems.

At evenfall the sailor went his way,
But left unrest eternal in my soul.
My tasks were all unfinished: stealing home,
My father faced me in a storm of wrath:
My poor heart, as I marked his livid rage,
Trembled and throbbed with terror; my white lips
Quivered, and failed me as I tried to speak.
He rushed upon me with his fist upraised
Ready to strike; but I eluded him,
And bounding, terror-stricken, from his reach,
Rushed out the door, and left his house forever.
So then, at sixteen years, I went to sea,
And never after looked on shores of Spain.

I came to Cuba in a trading ship,
After a voyage over stormy seas.
Panfilo de Narvaez in those days,
Fired with ambition and with avarice,
Had raised a fleet to conquer Florida;
His band of youthful cavaliers I joined
With heart elate: soon was I doomed to see
Hope's budding crescent sink in stormy clouds.

The western marge of Florida we reached,
And disembarking in a bay that wound
Far into the mainland, gazed around, and saw
A low and sandy country, fringed with palms
And drooping willows, and funereal oaks
Bearded with tattered hoary moss. Above,
The circling sea-fowl shrieked and cried forever,
And on the visage of that land there seemed,

As on a human face, to lie the shadow
Of some great secret sorrow never told,
And never to be shared in all the years
With any kindred heart in all the world.

We pitched our tents here. Ere onemoon had waned,
Ucita, chief of all the savages
Claiming the lordship of that wilderness,
Came with his marshaled braves, a mighty host,
To greet our leader. Though he came in peace,
Vowed friendship, and departed smilingly,
Narvaez, seeing that our band was small
Beside the dusky pagan multitudes
Swarming around, and seeing that our stores
Were dwindling fast, dispatched a brigantine
Back to Havana, with an urgent call
For more equipments and a stronger force.
I was among the crew that sailed away:
Our friends we left encamped upon the shore
Of the new country, waiting our return.

We prospered in our mission, gained recruits,
Loaded the ship with men's necessities,
And then returning after a season's round,
Cast anchor in the port whence first we had sailed.
But gazing up and down the beach, we saw
No vestige of the camp, nor any trace
Of the friends we had left behind: instead,
We viewed but lonely sands and gloomy woods.
Then, drawing nearer, we espied a reed
Driven upright in the sand, and at its tip
A sheet of paper fastened. Soon there strode
From thickets near a throng of savages,
All naked, and erect and tall, with limbs

Slender, superb and graceful, and rich-hued,
A crimson-brown, like carved mahogany.
Over their brows in brilliant coronals
Flaunted the red rays of flamingo plumes.

They made us friendly signals: then they dragged
A small canoe from out of its hiding-place
Behind a tangled mangrove, and ere long
Their little shallop floated on the tide.
Four men stepped in, rowed out and reached our ship,
And climbing the hull like squirrels, came with smiles
To meet our Captain. Using many signs
To aid his broken Spanish, one who seemed
The leader, said, "You see on yonder staff
A sheet of paper. It was left for you
By him who led you hither, and it bears
His message to you. Here our boat lies: come,
And we will row you over. There your eyes
May scan the paper." But the Captain asked,
"Where are our comrades? Here we left them.

Now

We see no sign of any Christian brave.
Where have our people gone?" The dusky folk,
Shaking their heads and shrugging their shoulders,
feigned

In answer that they understood him not.
Then said the Captain: "Go yourselves and fetch
The paper." "No," the leader answered him,
With many signs aiding his broken speech,
"Four of your braves may man our boat themselves,
Row to the shore, and fetch it. We will wait
Here on your own ship till your friends return
In safety. We are in your hands; fear not;
Our lives shall stand for theirs." The Captain paused,

Still loath to trust the pagans; but at last
In a careless mood he took them at their word.

He called for volunteers to man the boat:
Lad that I was, and thoughtless to the end,
I was the first to offer: pausing not,
Three others joined me. So we took the boat
And rowed to land; then quick as a musket-flash,
From ambush in the mangrove swamp hard by,
A swarm of savages came rushing out,
And pouncing upon us, tripped or knocked us down,
And tied our hands and feet. I kicked and fought
With all the fury of a frenzied bear
Clutched in the sharp claws of an iron trap.
In vain, in vain! They beat me till the blood
Blinded mine eyes, and drenched my face in red.
Aboard the ship, the natives, dolphin-like,
Leaped over into the sea; they swam ashore,
While our own gaping sailors, in amaze
Stood still as men of wood; thus they escaped,
Those villains who had lured us to the snare,
Nor was one carbine fired to stay their flight.
And now, in shame I say, that cowardly crew
Sent not one man to save us; but we saw
The vessel weigh her anchor, hoist her sail,
And fade away in distance on the sea,
Leaving us to those cruel savages,
In that barbaric country all alone!

Ah, then I knew indeed such depths of woe,
Such anguish as no earthly speech reveals.
Tears gushed from out mine eyes, mingling with blood
That trickled from my wounds. I cried to heaven;
But feeling that my complaints and prayers were vain,

I soon resigned myself to mute despair.
My comrades, like myself, at first had fought,
Then, overcome, had ceased to struggle. Now
Among our captors we descried a brave
Known unto all of us in bygone days,—
A shrewd, quick-witted savage, treacherous,
And yet not wholly bad. His lynx-like eyes,
His sharp, shrill voice,—O how I welcomed them
As things familiar and half-friendly, where
All else was unfamiliar, dark and strange,
Threatening with unknown horrors!

He had been

Narvaez's courier and interpreter,
Speaking Castilian with a Spaniard's ease.
We hailed him: then he told us why it was
His people had entrapped us. As we heard
The shocking tale, like wild steeds of the plains
Rearing and plunging when they fall to earth
Under the lasso,—with their frantic hoofs
Pawing the sod in furrows as they seek
Madly to burst their bonds,—our frightened hearts,
Bounding within our bosoms, seemed to strive
To break the ribs that barred them, in a great
Mad effort to leap forth and let us die,
Rather than face the doom we felt was ours!

"Narvaez, after ye had sailed, became
So brutal to our people, that their hearts
With fury burned against him. He himself
Led on his minions as they spoiled our huts,
And stripped our fields of corn. Night following night,
The darkness flushed to red, as wigwams flamed
Beneath their torches. In secluded lanes

Day after day were heard the harrowing screams
Of outraged women. Still we spared the wretch,
For ere his crimes had reached this fearful height,
Our chief, Ucita, and a chosen band
Of warriors went upon a mighty hunt
Into the north: for seventeen days they chased
The deer and bear: and we awaited them
Before we struck for vengeance. But one day,
Ere they returned, the mother of the chief,
A toothless, withered beldame, bent with years,
Came hobbling to Narvaez: by one hand
She dragged a weeping damsel, splashed with mire
And smeared with blood. Her clothing torn to shreds,
Her hair disheveled, and her half-clad breast
Dripping with crimson wounds, down fell the girl
Before the Spaniard, helpless, terrified,
Like a bird with a broken wing. Then shrieked
Ucita's ancient mother, 'Justice, lord!
See here this maid deflowered! see this blood,
These garments foul with mire! This is the deed
Of one of your men! Let him die for this!
Justice, my lord! Give us the villain's head!'

"Narvaez, puffed with rage that one should dare
To call him to his duty, cursed and swore,
Whipped out his sword, and in another breath
The poor old crone he skewered like a fowl.
But ceasing not at this, the murderer
Threw out the old worn body to his dogs.
The next day came; Ucita then returned;
Anguish and fury tore his heart; he sought
Narvaez, and denounced him wildly. So
The Spaniard, thus accused, arose in ire,
And made his guards lay hold upon Ucita.

Then,—horrible to tell!—he bade his men
Torture the chief, and maim him. O what pangs
The victim suffered at that devil's hands!
His cheeks, his lips, his ears and nose were gashed;
His face was made as hideous as the visage
Of some black monster whose unearthly scowl
Frightens lost children groping through the dark
In tangled forests far away from home.
So then we rose in wrath! at night we fell
Upon the Spaniards; many did we slay,
And many more we wounded. Taking flight,
Narvaez sought the north: we followed close,
Hung on his flanks, and chased him many leagues.
Not waiting your return, he and his men
Fashioned rude boats; in these they sought the waves,
To save them from our darts; but a storm rose,
And ere it ended, he and all his crew
Were swallowed in the billows of the sea.

“The chief swore vengeance on your race. He knew
Your ship would soon return; and so he planned
The plot that now hath snared you. When they fled,
Your comrades left old papers here and there,
And one of these was hoisted on the reed
To tempt you,—and the ruse worked well. Ha, ha!
Since you are gathered safely in the toils,
What merry-making shall there be to-morrow!”

He shook with fiendish laughter; we recoiled
In breathless horror: what would be our fate?
He who had suffered at Narvaez's hands,
Whose visage had been made a hideous wreck,
Whose gray-haired mother had been fed to dogs,—
O, who could sound the madness and the rage

Seething and bubbling in that savage breast!
 We shrank with terror as above our heads
 Impalpable, yet sure as death, we felt
 There now impended some horrific doom,
 To make that bosom thrill with frightful joy!

Here perished all my dreams, and here I reaped
 The harvest of my folly! Ye have heard
 Of poor benighted savages who come
 With gold-dust or with ivory or with pearls,
 Rubies or diamonds, to their island-strands,
 And barter all their wealth for tinsel gauds,
 Trinkets of brass, or tawdry beads: but I,
 More foolish than those naked savages,
 Had sold my treasures of contentedness,
 And peace and hours of ease, for discontent,
 For misery, and the blackness of despair!

That day they marched us many weary miles.
 Tripping on creepers, stumbling over logs,
 Tearing through brambles, wading quags and fens,
 Exhausted and bedraggled, stiff and sore,
 Often we sank, longing to breathe our last.
 Above us, from the melancholy boughs,
 Like curtains in a mausoleum's gloom,
 Hung the long grizzled mosses. By the shores
 Of dreary tarns, great alligators dozed,
 And as they dozed, half opened fearful jaws
 Bristling with saw-like teeth, so that they seemed
 Grinning in mockery at us. As I sat
 Resting one moment from that weary march,
 A little sweet-voiced goldfinch from a bough
 Above me, trilled a joyous lay. "O God!"
 I thought, "how strange it is, that man, Thy son,

Thy favored son, should weep and wail in bonds,
While a frail bird, without a mind or soul,—
Least of Thy least,—should wander glad and free!”

At length we reached their village; there we stopped
As day was ending. Now they gave us leave
To topple down to the earth and snatch some sleep;
But still they kept our aching hands and feet
Fettered together. All that fearful night
Malignant eyes watched keenly over us,
Noting our every movement, every sigh.
At first I lay awake, revolving plans
To leap on foot and rush for liberty;
Ah, hopeless longing—not one chance was given!
At last, despite my agonies and fears,
Weak, broken, wasted from our long day's march,
I fell asleep, and woke not till the dawn.
In dim, fond dreams I roved a boy again,
And saw once more my childhood home in Spain;
Once more I lived and laughed in far Seville,
The dear old peaceful town where I was born.

But suddenly I wakened with a start;
My cheeks were trickling with outgushing tears:
O, never might I see my far-off home,
For I lay captive in barbaric hands,
Confronted by some black, abhorrent doom
I dared not whisper in my secret soul!

At noon they dragged us to an open field,
Encircled by a wattled stockade; steep
And high the walls arose to fence us in.
Within this close the savage warriors stood,
Naked, tattooed and painted, crowned with plumes,

Bows in their hands and quivers at their backs.
Treading around that field, or seated high
Upon the wall, still other multitudes
Of Indians thronged, countless as countless flocks
Of sea-fowl swarming on some rocky isle,
The nesting-place of myriads of their kind.

They stripped us of our garments, till we stood
As naked as themselves: next we were told
That, one by one, all four would be unbound,
And given a chance to dash for liberty:
But much I feared that this was but a ruse
To stretch to the uttermost our pangs of death.
What chance had any wretch to scale that wall,
When scores of Indians, ready with drawn bows,
Might pierce him like a wild beast through and
through?

Dazed with affright I turned, and there I saw,
High on a dais, old Ucita, throned
Between his wife and daughter: merciful God,
The scowl upon that frightful countenance!
Grief, madness, malice, writhed and twisted there.
So, as in sleep, one sees a nightmare shape,—
A fell, ferocious monster, black as hell,—
A nameless horror come to clutch his throat,—
Yet, with his tongue tied, and his helpless feet
Fettered as though in manacles of steel,
Can not take flight, and can not cry aloud,—
Spellbound I saw that fierce, malicious face,
And longed to fly, and longed to scream for help,
But yet was as dumb as any speechless brute,
Immovable as any breathless corpse.
My heart hung frozen; cold and clammy dews

Came stealing down my face. How could I hope
For mercy from that wild, infuriate soul?
And knowing all the wrongs he had endured,
Not even I could justly censure him!

The chieftain's daughter was young and beautiful:
Wild and barbaric, yet of winsome ways,
Savage, yet playful, sharp perchance, yet sweet,
She seemed a leopard-kitten, half in sport
And half in anger, teasing dam and sire,
Hung on their necks or lolling at their feet.

First they call forth a brawny Catalan,
By name Sebastian Lopez; suddenly
They bid him flee for life. Swiftly he runs
Toward the stockade; the barbarian horde
Bend all their bows upon him as he flies.
But all the darts are blunted, so they slay
Not instantly; yet anchoring in the skin,
Smarting and burning, with long-lingering pains
They rack their frenzied victim. The fiends plan,
With torment heaped on torment, to delay
The merciful peace of death! We must all reel
Slowly, though surely, onward, suffering
A hellish age of miseries ere we gain
Surcease of anguish in oblivion.
How the wild mobs of Indians whoop with joy,
Gloating with devilish eyes upon that wretch
Now seeking to escape! See, in one breath
A score of feathered reeds from skilful bows
Are sticking from his body! now he falls
Flat on the ground, but springing to his feet,
He starts again, with one mad, desperate hope
To reach the stockade. But he strives in vain;

For ever as he seeks to scale the wall,
A throng of Indians rush and drive him back,
Dazed and discouraged. Still more arrows fly
To pierce his quivering flesh; he writhes and screams
In piteous agony, as he stands still,
And shuddering, seeks with wildly-trembling hands
To wrench the barbs out; but he makes his pangs
Only more poignant still. He cries aloud,
"For God's sake, mercy! Pity, pity me!
O spare me, spare me!" But the savages
Yell in derision, and they drive him forth
To the dread sport again. Often he falls,
Stumbling and sprawling in the dust; again
They flog him till he rises to his feet,
And so resumes the frightful race of death.
But now his pace grows slower; by this time
He bristles like a struggling eagle, quilled
With arrows from a hundred bowmen hurled.
He falls again, again, again! At last
His form lies motionless. Two long, long hours,
That seem eternity, have passed. The man
Has suffered all that heaven permits. They shake him,
Kick him and cuff him, but he stirs no more:
We know that death has come to end his pain.

They called our next companion. He was one
Whom Cortez in the bygone years had led
To battle on the plains of Mexico.
Diego Valdez was his name. Dark-browed,
Black-haired and bristle-bearded, huge of limb,
With fierce bright eyes, and heavy bull-dog jaws,
Whoever knew him well knew that his life
Would go at heavy cost. But having seen
His comrade beg for life, the barbarous horde

Shouted and jeered, counting on easy sport
From him, as from the other.

Rushing forth

Across the open field, he nears the wall
At an unsentried point: but as he flies,
A cloud of arrows from the savage bows
Hisses around him: in his quivering flesh,
Like fiery serpent-fangs, he feels their stings.
But undismayed, he singles out one brave,
Speeds onward through the angry whizzing darts,
And like a thunderbolt smites his man down,
Striking him senseless with his stalwart fist:
Then lifting up the victim in his arms,
He guards his own life with that human shield.
The bow and arrows from his conquered foe
Quickly he snatches; then he scatters forth
A volley at his startled enemies.
A skilful archer he! No shaft goes wrong,
For every missile seeks and strikes its mark.
Behind him is the shelter of the wall;
His victim is upheld in front: and thus
Screened from the mob himself, he launches out
His arrows till that craven multitude
Runs howling like a pack of wolves. We hear
His victim, yet alive, though racked with pain,
Give vent to groans; but still the wretch is held
To shield his captor. Now the Indians seek
To parley with the Spaniard; but he knows
Their treachery, and he scorns their terms of peace.
"Base paynims!" cries he, "One regret alone
Bides with me as I die—regret for this:
That I am impotent to drag you all
Down with me, screaming, to the flames of hell!"

Time passes by, the Indians counseling,
 And making overtures which still he scorns.
 But now, alas! few arrows has he left;
 Upon his body countless barbs are hung;
 Blood bathes him from his forehead to his feet.
 Again they rush upon him; he shoots forth
 The few blunt arrows left, making them sink,
 As all the rest have sunk, in savage flesh.
 But now they seize him; ere they bind his hands,
 A dart he clutches; from his mighty fist
 It strikes with the force of the strongest bow,
 Driving straight forward through a warrior's arm.
 One brave, infuriate, wields his tomahawk,
 And strikes the Spaniard down. So then he dies,
 But dying, curses them with his last breath.

I glanced at old Ucita; scowling down,
 His face was ghastly with malicious rage;
 But I beheld his squaw avert her eyes,
 Sickening to view my comrades' mortal pangs:
 So, when the second Christian died, she rose
 Shuddering, and hastened from the place. But still
 The daughter sat beside the chief, and soon
 Methought she pitied us. I watched her close:
 With earnest words and trembling, gesturing hands,
 Somehow I knew she pleaded for our lives;
 But old Ucita frowned; shaking his head,
 He waved her off impatiently. And then
 The Indian who had been interpreter
 Slipped near me, and he whispered in mine ear,
 "We save thee for the last, for thou art young,
 And not so strong as thy companions. Now
 The chieftain's daughter begs him spare thy life,
 And there is yet one tiny chance for thee."

Hope, like a wild bird, fluttered in my breast:
A lad I was of barely eighteen years,
And at that age we feel that life is sweet!
But now they called my next companion. God!
Was I so selfish? Could I see my friend
Go to the torture, and yet feel this thrill
Of hope for mine own safety? For this youth,
Pedro Miranda, was the last of all
My comrades, and of all my chosen mates
The nearest and the dearest. In the past,
Pedro, beside me, as a sailor-boy
Had scaled the lofty overbending mast
When clouds went flying, and the booming winds
Flung the salt spume aloft, and splashed and drenched
Our faces on that dizzy perch: with me
His hands had heaved the anchor overboard:
With me the captain's curses, and the mate's
Brutal revilings had he oft endured
In patience. Oft beside me on the ground,
In damp, unwholesome tropic woods, at night
Had lain that comrade, as the piercing cries
Of sleepless wild beasts hurtled, and we drowsed
And dreamed of slumber-songs once heard at home.

Unlike the dark-eyed, dark-haired Spanish lads,
His eyes were blue; and yellow were his locks
As the silk of Indian corn. Not tawny-skinned
Like boys of southern birth, his fair young limbs
Seemed moulded of the blue-veined virgin snows
Forever white on Pyrenean peaks
Where he was born and cradled. He had left
That mountain home with eager hopes, to seek
His fortune over seas: mother and sire,
Sister and brother, he had lost—and all

For fancied ease and happiness. O heaven,
Behold at last his fearful recompense!

Myself I now forgot: I wept aloud:
I begged to take his place. But hark! Again
Sternly the Indians called him. Then around
My neck the last time did he throw his arms.
“Farewell!” he cried, and kissed me. But I wept
So wildly that I even could not sob
“Farewell!” in answer. Tearing him away,
The Indians bade him run for life. The lad
Was slender, nimble, and as fleet of foot
As any antelope that skims the plains:
So thus I hoped his speed would save his life;
God, how I prayed to see him make escape!

He clears the open space in one wild bound,
Reaches the stockade, and begins to climb!
“O Heaven!” I cry, “still fleetier make his feet;
Save him, I beg; let him go free!” But no!
A warrior, anxious that his breath shall end
Ere his swift slender limbs may thwart their hate,
Shoots forth a dart as keen as a viper-sting,
Which pins him to the wall he seeks to climb:
The flint has pierced his heart: and so he dies.
Mine eyes are blind with tears. But from my grief
A clamor startles me, and I behold
That horde of demons thirsting for my blood.

For now my turn has come! In fearful straits,
I look up at the savage princess there,
And though my heart is quaking, force a smile.
She understands the signal, throws her arms
Around her father's neck, and begs for me,—

Begs ardently, insistently, with sobs
That shake her girlish bosom like a storm.
And then, somehow, his cruel eye grows dim,
The awful tension on his brow relaxes;
He wavers,—hesitates,—pauses to think!
He rises: waves his hand: slowly the crowd
Begins dispersing, and I know at last
My agony is ended,—I am saved!

The princess glanced upon me smilingly:
I ran toward her, sank upon my knees,
And madly grateful, snatched and kissed her hand.
She laughed aloud in a delightful way,
And then in liquid accents, with the aid
Of friendly signs, she sweetly bade me rise.

BOOK III

Juan Ortiz continues his narrative—His ordeal at the stake—
He is again rescued by the Princess Ulela—Guarding the
burial-grounds of the tribe—The mother and her dead
child—Ortiz's adventure with the panther—His escape to
Mocozo's dominions—His final rescue by the Spaniards.

ALTHOUGH my life was spared, too soon I found
Ucita's malice was unsatisfied:
Day after day, with unrelenting spite
He cast upon me gross indignities.
A beaten slave, I sweated and I groaned
In brutish toil that never had an end.
I hewed the wood; I made the wigwam fires;
I fetched the water from a distant spring;
I bore the arms and blankets to the hunt,
And when the chase was over, on my back
The heavy slaughtered animals were heaped.
The Indians kicked and cuffed me when I fell
Under great loads my shoulders could not bear.
They hooted at me weeping, and they laughed
To see my streaming blood when whipped and
scourged,
Crying, "Look at the weakling! Hear him whimper
Like an unweaned pappoose!" Above the rest,
Ucita took delight in harrying me
With blows and curses. In a little time
My ears had caught the language meagerly,
And then from whispers that I overheard

I knew the chief repented of his act
Of clemency toward me; later still,
I knew he sought my life again. I longed
To flee the country, but a host of spies
Forever dogged my footsteps: all my friends
Had perished: if I left Ucita's realms,
What refuge was there in the wilds beyond?

One day Ulela,—she who had saved my life,—
The chieftain's daughter,—suddenly grew ill.
A fortnight passed; yet still the princess lay
Tossing in fever on her couch. And now
I trembled, for I knew the wily chief
Half feared his daughter, though he loved her well,
And seeing she was ill, at any hour
Taking advantage of her helplessness,
Might glut the malice that her hand had stayed.
Soon the dark prophecies of my worst fears
Proved more than true. One morning as I stood
Lifting a water-jar beside the spring,
Ucita, with a brutal-visaged crowd,
The lowest ruffians of the tribe, came down
The forest-path, and called me. "Come with us,"
He said, and as he spake, a stalwart brave
Laid hand upon my shoulder roughly. "Come,"
This minion echoed. Startled, I recoiled,
Trembling with fearful prescience. "But my jar,—
I came to fill it,—I must take it back,
As I was bidden, to your wigwam, Sire,"
I pleaded to Ucita. With a growl,
The churl who held me wrenched my jar away,
And threw it, splashing, to the ground. "Come,
come!"
He thundered, and he clutched me by the arm,

Dragging me onward with him. "Why is this?"
I sobbed appealingly; "What have I done?
What do you wish with me?" I wept aloud,
But heeding not, they hurried me away
Through the dark shadows of that lonely wood,
Further and further from all human aid.

They dragged me on still further through the wood,
When—merciful God!—before us I beheld
A pile of fagots underneath a frame
As gaunt and hideous in its nakedness
As a stark bare-ribbed skeleton. They planned
To burn me at the stake! There, there were heaped
The splintered pines,—arranged with devilish care
To feed the hellish flames! Then my brain reeled;
A blinding light seemed flashed before my eyes;
A strong hand seemed to choke me, and my heart
Seemed crushed in iron bands. My knees
Tottered beneath me, and through all my frame,
Ice-cold, the life-blood shuddered. Then my teeth
Chattered with terror, and my swollen tongue
Seemed wagging in a mouth crammed full of dust.
But gaining speech once more, I fell to the earth,
Shrieking, "O, do not burn me! Let me die
By tomahawk or bow, but not by fire!
Have mercy! Do not burn me! Stab my heart,
Drown me, strangle me, but for the love of God,
Save me this torture of a death by fire!"
But the black miscreants, heeding not my prayers,
Began with unconcern the tasks that marked
Sure preparation for their dreadful scheme.

The fire is kindled; then my hands and feet
They tie together; then they bind me down

Upon the framework close above the fire;
The smoke rolls in a stifling, choking cloud;
It strangles me; it burns and blinds mine eyes.
And now the savages, with horrid glee
Joining their hands and circling round the stake,
Begin their frenzied dance; now drunk with fury,
Gnashing their teeth, and wallowing in the dust,
They shriek and scream in maniac delight,
Foam at the mouth, shake with convulsive spasms;
Then bounding madly to their feet again,
They yell, and brandishing their tomahawks,
Begin their hymns, as fierce and terrible
As hymns of fiends to Lucifer in hell.
Soon the hot flames begin to scorch my flesh;
Still keener grows the blaze. O, who can tell
The frightful anguish of a death by fire?
I cry aloud, but every cry is drowned
In the wild singing of their dreadful songs.

But suddenly I hear a woman's voice;
It is Ulela's! Swifter than a spear,
She bounds among the warriors, reaches the fire,
And hurls the blazing brands to left and right.
Quickly the flames are quenched; so then she stands
Trembling, and weak and wan from suffering,
Yet terrible in her anger, crying out,
"It is not lawful thus to sacrifice
A human life save unto gods alone:
No sacred feast for many days we hold;
The Moon of Green Corn glimmers first to-night;
Not till the Bear Moon falls that festival."¹⁰
You would call down the certain wrath of heaven
To offer up this lad to fiery death,
And not in honor of the powers above."

She bade them bring fresh water from the brook,
And taking me in her arms, she bathed my wounds,
Murmuring sweet words of comfort, like a dove
Cooing above her nest. How soft her touch,
How gentle all her ministrations! Yea,
She soothed my anguish by her very breath,
Which fanned my burnt flesh like a fresh cool gale
Blown from a mountain peak enrobed in snow
Over a waste of fiery desert sands.
Abashed, the ruffians who had sought my life
Sneaked from her presence; the old chief himself,
Slinking crestfallen, hardly growled a curse.

Long did I languish ere my wounds were healed,
And often within that time Ulela came
To see me, bearing in her slender hands
Delicious fruits,—strawberries, bloomy plums,
And custard-apples: she herself prepared,
Over hot coals, light golden cakes of maize,
And tempting savory game,—a hare, or quail,
Or squirrel,—and she brought them to my side
That I might eat, and once again rejoice
In health restored.

But after weary days,
When I at last rose limping, I was told
A task repulsive yet awaited me:
The graveyard of the tribe was I to guard
Through the long night, from sunset unto dawn,
That no wild beast might desecrate the graves.
Those Paynims lowered not their dead in earth,
But folded them in fabrics made from leaves
Of palm-trees that abounded in the land,
And laid them out on frames above the ground.

Ucita gave to me a bow and arrows
To slay the ghoulis prowlers, and he snarled,
"Take warning: if we ever find one grave
After the night despoiled, be sure thy life,
Spared twice, we spare no more." A watchman came
At dawn of every day to view the grounds,
And note if all my duties had been done.
My task was one no wretch might long survive;
All night, exposed to dank malarial winds,
I breathed the exhalations of the swamps,
And air made poisonous by ten thousand dead,
So that I often sickened and grew faint,
Now scorched with fevers, now with agues chilled.
All night the wolves roamed howling through the
woods;

From dismal tarns fierce alligators roared;¹¹
Shadowed by drapery of the long weird moss,
Owls screamed and hooted in the ghostly trees.
Voracious wild beasts of uncertain form
Gliding about, would utter savage cries;
Often these brutes would leap within the close,
And often would I frighten them away.

Through solemn midnight hours my watch I stood,
Amid the horrors of that wilderness,
By fate deluded, orphaned and disowned.
Where now my brave ambitions? What a fall
From heights Olympian down to Stygian glooms!
The tintinnabulating siren call
Ceased ringing in mine ears from far away;
And like a melting moon in skies of dawn,
I saw my opalescent dream dissolve.
Wan, wasted, with her yellow nimbus gone,
Her pinions trailing in the dust, deplumed,

And with her cheeks, purpureal once, grown pale,
Dejected Fancy wept. And now, alas,
My treasure-galleons, shipwrecked far from port,
In blackened ruins strewed on desert strands.
The Lydian king might with his airest touch
Transmute all baser objects into gold,—
But all things that I touched had turned to clay.
O ye who hear, forswear illusive hopes
That lead to maledictions of the gods!
O leave the bloom unplucked upon its stem,
The tempting fruit untasted on its bough;
The golden pollen soon is tarnished dust;
The golden rind conceals a bitter core!

One day, at dusk, a frantic mother came
Bearing a little dead boy in her arms.
Beside her walked her husband and her friends,
But the cold corpse she held herself alone,
Sharing with none her burden. Afterward,
Returning from the death-grounds, solemnly
She bade me guard the body of her child
With added vigilance. In faltering tones
I promised, but the fever fired my veins,
And, like a child, I feared the coming dark.
That selfsame night, within the neighboring swamp
I heard a fearsome growl, that ever came
Closer and closer; soon there blazed two eyes,
Glaring like green and yellow meteors;
Something slipped near; next, with a frightful roar
It leaped upon the body of the boy,
And bore its quarry back toward the swamp.
With all the puny strength that still was mine
Quickly I twanged an arrow at the beast;
I knew not whether I had missed or struck,

But fancied that I heard a yelp of pain,
And a low whine succeeding. In distress,
Dazed and bewildered, I began a search
To find the creature and its prey; alas!
My pains were fruitless. "Surely now," I thought,
"My evil star beacons me to my fate."

At last, in eastern skies faint streaks of dawn
Glimmered and brightened. From a leafless bough,
(The gaunt arm of a huge dead cypress-tree),
A turkey-cock began his morning calls;¹²
Another answered; then another still;
Green water-oaks seemed swarming with the fowls;
Then all the forest quivered through its leaves,
Resounding to the clangor as they crowed.
Ere day had well advanced, the watchman came,
And as I heard him, my affrighted heart
Trembled within me, like the morning star
Throbbing and palpitating there on high.
In agitation I revealed him all;
Stern was his look, and when he saw the frame
Robbed of its little tenant, angrily
He thundered, "Sluggard, thou hast failed in duty!
Thou hast been sleeping: hadst thou kept awake,
This had not happened. Plead thy cause no more:
Thy life is forfeit. I shall take thee now
Unto Ucita to receive thy sentence."
Enfeebled as I was, my tottering feet
Could scarcely drag me twenty paces; yet,
Rousing myself, I begged him go with me,
In one last effort to redeem my life.
The man assented, grumbling; so we tore
Through netted brambles where some tracks appeared.
At length we spied a trace of blood; beyond,

We found unharmed the little dead pappoose.
Still further on we saw a panther lie,
A big-boned, tawny creature, long and slim,
His neck pierced by mine arrow. Seeing this,
The watchman, well appeased, said, "Thou wast right;
Thou hast done all thy duty, lad: fear not."

So afterwards my dreary watch I kept,
Till seven moons in the skies had waxed and waned;
But soon the sacred festival would come,
Poising my life in doubt again. One night,
As I paced wearily my lonesome round,
Watching the Great Bear circle through the heavens,
And longing for the tardy light of day,
I heard a little pattering through the trees,
Faint-falling like the trip of human feet;
Then, like a shadow with a human shape,
Dowed with the shadow of a human voice,
Ulela stood before me suddenly.

"Juan," whispered she, "our festival we hold
After three days have passed. Shouldst linger here,
My father and his crew would spare thee not.
I have petitioned for thee hour by hour,
But vainly. I have coaxed and threatened, stormed,
Entreated and implored. All my old arts,
My wiles and blandishments and strategems
So powerful with my father once, I used,
And brought to aid them all my sighs and tears,
And frowns and wild reproaches. But he stands,
For the first time, unwavering; angrily
He spurns my prayers. So thou must flee this land.
One short day's journey hence, another chief,—"
She faltered here, abashed, and hung her head—
"A noble prince—Mocozo is his name,—

Rules his realm justly; he is dear to me,
For we have been betrothed for many moons.
To-morrow, ere the first glint of the dawn,
A messenger will come to lead thee hence,
And guide thee safely to Mocozo's land.
Delay not for a moment when he comes,
But speed away,—there will be hot pursuit.
Here, take this girdle; it was given to me
By him I love; when thou hast met my prince,
Show him the girdle; he will understand
Thou comest at my hest, imploring aid:
So, surely will he guard thee with his life.
Now, Juan, farewell; for I must haste away."
Ere I could thank her, she had left my side,
And gliding like a shadow as before,
Had vanished even more swiftly than she came.

Time passed; before the first dim ray of dawn,
Appeared the messenger. "Haste, haste!" he cried,
"Soon will they follow us." I turned, alert,
And with him fled toward Mocozo's land.
The trail was rarely trodden, indistinct,
And led through tangled creepers, twisted vines,
Dense thickets, and low-swinging boughs of trees.
The shattered waning moon rose in the east,
And glimmered with a mournful pallid light
Till the gray dawn blached into silvery day.
Weak as I was from vigils of the night,
For a few weary miles we stumbled on,
Slowly and painfully. When daybreak shone,
We made our progress faster. Now we heard
The happy song-birds carol in the trees,
And saw strange, brilliant blossoms hang above;
There trilled and soared the painted nonpareil;

Here flamed and flaunted gem-like humming-birds;
There glowed the great hibiscus through the green
With constellations of its crimson blooms;
Convolvuluses, rosy-hued and white,
Their trumpet-shaped corollas dangled down.
But loveliness and joy allured us not,
For well we knew pursuers followed fast,
And both our hearts hung quivering in our breasts,
Asking what fearful doom awaited us
Should we be overtaken. Frightful thought!
Spent though I was, I hobbled with the guide
Till day was far advanced. "Come now, come now!"
He panted, "There is but another league,
Only one other league, and we are there!"

But hark! Behind us hurtles a yelping shout,—
Our foes are coming, chasing us with dogs!
My feet are bleeding; every joint is sore;
My head reels dizzy, and my sight is blurred;
But when I hear that hoarse, blood-curdling sound,
Aroused, new ardor speeds me faster still.
At length, Mococho's village rears in view;
Yet looking back, we see a furious horde,
Ucita's minions, eager in pursuit,
Their dogs, loud-yelping, leading on the chase.
We run like madmen; still the dogs gain fast:
Scarce four short furlongs yet dis sever us
From safety in the little town. But now,
Fierce as a tiger, foaming at the mouth,
One dog, far swifter than the rest, bounds up,
And well-nigh snaps our heels. I draw my bow,
And pointing straight toward the monster's breast,
Shoot forth an arrow; silent, swift and sure
As the dread shaft of Destiny itself,

It pierces through his hide and cleaves his heart;
Then with a howl he leaps in air and falls,
Dying in quick convulsions at my feet.

Forward we sped before the others came.
But soon the Indians, drawing nearer still,
Began to fly their arrows, though they failed
To strike us, hailing fast a flinty shower
Above and around us, missing narrowly,
Until we reached Mococho's border-line,
Where a dart pierced my foot. I swayed and fell;
But instantly there rushed from out the town
A throng of men who lifted me in arms,
And bore me to a wigwam. Others cried
To our pursuers, "Halt! Let these men be!
Dare not to cross our border, or ye die."

A moment more, and then Mococho came,
A youth superb, whose regal air proclaimed
The true-born monarch of the wilderness.
I gave the girdle to him, telling all.
"Be sure," he said, "that I will be thy friend,
For the sake of her who sent thee." Wavering not,
He kept that promise with a prince's faith.
He drove Ucita's sullen men away:
From that blest hour they harried me no more.

Ucita, deeply angered, then refused
His daughter to Mococho. But in time
The chief relented; so the twain espoused.
Thus twelve years passed: so kind Mococho proved,
That in the end I stood resigned to fate.
Now freed from all the perils, pains and toils
That once had plagued me on the sea and land,

Contented, lapped in dreamful calm and ease,
In thankfulness to God, my spirit kept
A sweet and holy sabbath of repose.

My hands and face were tattooed, as you see,
I wandered naked like the savages,
And tanned as brown as any Indian brave.
One day the Christians landed on that coast,
Led by the Governor of Florida,
De Soto, whom we love so well. A troop
He sent to scour the land. On that same day
I wandered with the red men on a hunt,
And in those wilds the Spanish cavaliers
Galloped upon us at a sudden turn.
The Spaniards fired their muskets: instantly
The forest trembled, and loud echoes roared,
As though an earthquake shook the solid world.
The simple natives, who in all their days
Had never known such dreadful arms of war,
Shivering with terror, sank upon their knees,
Praying the Great Spirit to forego his wrath.
In twelve long years my lips had nigh forgot
My mother tongue, dear accents of Castile,
The noblest, sweetest, softest tones of earth,
The language that the seraphs speak in heaven.
But now mine eyes rejoiced to see once more
Familiar faces of my countrymen,
And so in broken Spanish I exclaimed,
"Hold, hold, my brethren, hold! Peace! Do not fire!
I am a Christian! take me with you hence,
But do not harm these men; they are my friends."
Their arms they lowered; so they took me thence,
And carried me before the Governor.
I joined his host, and so you see me here.

BOOK IV

The Chief requests De Soto to relate his own history—De Soto's narrative begun—His early life—The Guadiana River—Pedrarias and Balboa—Balboa's escape from his creditors—He acquires great power in Darien—He is betrothed to Maria, daughter of Pedrarias—Later he is beheaded by orders of Pedrarias—De Soto's meeting with Isabel—His courtship—Pedrarias opposes De Soto's suit—Pedrarias induces De Soto to accompany him to America—Maria arranges a farewell meeting between De Soto and Isabel—The lovers exchange vows of constancy as De Soto is leaving Spain for his long journey to the New World.

THE speaker ended. After a moment's pause,
The gray-haired monarch, turning, softly smiled,
And said to Ortiz, "I have hearkened, son,
With deepening wonder to thy narrative.
He who hath seen such perils and escaped,
Must know the one Great Spirit is his friend,
And feel protected wheresoever he treads."

Then to De Soto Micalusa turned,
And said, "Wouldst thou, O knight, relate to us
The history of thine own adventurous life?
Pleased would we be to know it. It must be
One that would move us; wilt thou let us hear?"
De Soto, answering, told his story thus:

Illustrious Chieftain, what a tiny span
Is the most famous life of all this world

In the long annals of the race of men!
 For, like a narrow isthmus that connects
 Two continents, the Future and the Past,
 Outflung by hands of God, its fragile strand,
 Joining the life that was with that to come,
 Trails onward with an ocean on each hand,
 The little Known cleaving the vast Unknown.
 Great are my faults; grave were the many errors
 Committed in my past. And yet, great Chief,
 The very blunders of our lives may be
 Such warning to ourselves and unto others,
 That they may turn to blessings. Though I fall,
 The chastisement that follows on that fall
 May save me and my brothers. Yea indeed,
 Out of my darkness may emerge your light;
 Out of my sins may your salvation come.

At Xeres I was born,—¹³ a little town
 Not distant from the line decreed of old
 Dissevering Spain from realms of Portugal.
 Hard by, the far-famed Guadiana flows.
 Where lift the sharp sierras red and bare,
 Its natal fountains gush. Meandering on
 Through pleasant groves of cork-trees ever green,
 And down the vales in dalliance wantoning,
 It blinks and babbles at the grateful herds
 Red-visaged swains have guided to its slopes
 To quench their thirst and rest in shades of noon.
 But doomed and driven by some mysterious fate,
 It plunges into the bowels of the earth,
 And underground it gropes for many leagues
 Through caverns chill in everlasting gloom,
 Through Stygian caves, benighted labyrinths.
 Then disenthralled, it leaps to light again

Beneath a sunburst falling splendid,
And onward glints and glides caressingly
Through daisied meadows, sweet poetic fields,
Where myrtles mirror in the friendly waves,
And lilting birds make bowers melodious.
Now happy is it as a human soul
That once was cheered by genial, glowing suns
In transitory joyance of this life,
But shrouded with its mortal self in earth,
Was left to moulder in the rayless gloom,
Then, after lying lost to life and hope,
Freed from its dungeon underground, to shine
Transfigured on its Resurrection Morn,
Arises more resplendent than before.

My parents, gently born and reared in ease,
Wedded for love when both were portionless;
But fortune frowned upon them; so, in time,
Facing dull scenes of sordid poverty,
They feared to see their children grope through life
Unlettered and unschooled. But in these days,
Entering the service of a wealthy lord,
My father pleased his patron, who ere long
Extended to our house a friendly hand.
Pedrarias was the one of whom I speak:¹⁴
This old hidalgo, pompous, rich and vain,
And condescending in his patronage,
Sometimes proved generous in his better moods,
But oftener cruel and tyrannical,
And ever purse-proud. From his ample means,
With careful hands a petty sum he doled,
Whereby my father's children all received
A little training in the world of books.
I went to Saragossa; there I learned

A smattering of the arts and sciences,
And much of fencing, much of horsemanship,
Of boxing, wrestling, and the use of arms,
Beside the airs that courtiers must assume
While prancing in their laces and their silks
Through all the light parade of gallantry.
Fine training this, for one whose slender purse
Could scarcely buy one scanty little meal,
Or one night's lodging at a country inn!
But so it fell; with aims beyond my means,
And schooling that disdained my niggard lot,
I was foredoomed to be a wanderer,
Seeking adventure over land and sea.

While still I roamed a boy, Pedrarias sailed
For Darien, as its viceroy. When debarked,
He found Balboa (that undaunted knight
Who first beheld the king of Oceans), raised
To despot mastership of all the realm.
From Xeres, like myself, Balboa came,
But in that year which marked my birth, he left
To wrest his fortune from the western world.
Hispaniola first he sought, and there
He lingered some few seasons. But he lost
The little hoard of pesos brought from Spain,
And soon, in seeking to relieve his wants,
Staggered beneath a mountain-load of debts.
No one that land might lawfully depart
While any debt remained unsatisfied.
So then Balboa had a barrel made¹⁵
Of huge dimensions, crawled inside the cask,
And had the head nailed in. Thus was he rolled,
Still in the barrel, to a ship that sailed
That very hour for Darien. By and by,

When land was lost to view, he broke the head,
Crept out of the barrel, and revealed himself
To the astonished sailors. For a time
The captain raged and blustered, but at last
Appeased, grew friendly. Reaching Darien,
The exile's genius won him place and power.
Pedrarias watched his rival jealously,
But feared to strike at once. And so Maria,
The eldest of the daughters of his house,
He offered in betrothal to the foe.
Gladly Balboa gave assent. But soon
Pedrarias slyly trapped him unawares,
And first imprisoned, then beheaded him.
When the doomed knight was led before the block,
Within a hut hard by Pedrarias stood,
Concealed: and peeping through a little chink,
He smiled to see Balboa lose his head.
For five dark years he ruled in Darien,
Writing his reign in blood. The red men feared,
The Spaniards hated him. Slaying at will,
He won the dread name, *Furor Domini*,
And truly like the Wrath of God he smote
And trampled his victims in the very dust.
Then he sailed home, but planning to return
To Darien later, and resume the sway
Which in the past had cursed that fated land.

From Saragossa I had just arrived,
A slender lad of barely nineteen years.
Pedrarias asked me then to visit him,
And so I often saw him at his home.
One day, conversing with him and his wife,¹⁶
His second daughter, Isabel, came in
And sat between her parents. She was young,

A little maiden of but fifteen springs,
Who hung about her mother like a child.
A little filmy frock of silk she wore,
And sweet white hyacinths in her clustering curls.
Not wan nor fair-haired like a Northern maid,
Her face was like a crocus born in spring,
Her tresses blacker than a blackbird's plumes.
O, she was lovelier than an April morn,
With April skies, and April birds and blooms,
With April songs, and April suns and showers,
Now laughing and now pouting, now in tears,
But ever bringing visions of delight.

Her dark eyes scanned me, quickly glanced away,
As brown, as swift, as wild as twin gazelles.
I looked her in the face; after a pause
Her frightened brown eyes looked again in mine,
And then I knew that she was made for me,
And I was made for her; that long before,
In some dim age, before the world began,
God planned to make us both, and make us one,
And nowhere, on the land, nor on the sea,
Nor in this world, nor any world to come,
Was any other man or woman born
To take the place of either with the other,
Or make one glad without the other's love,
Or blest without the other as a mate.

I marked a shade of sadness cross her brow;
She felt, like me, this was the hour of fate!
She knew her toys and playthings now must go
With days of childhood, to the buried past.
I saw the child-soul in her pleading eyes
Gaze in a half-reproachful, wistful way,

Still lingering, longing for its old-time nest
In that sweet, happy bosom of the girl,
Yet knowing that its glorious day was done,
Then, like some bird, unearthly, mystical,
Returning from its exile back to heaven,
Take leave forever of this hapless world.

While we sat there her father talked for hours
Of wonders in the land of Darien,
Of wars with Indians, pillaging of towns,
Of building forts, of fighting buccaneers,
Of deeds of daring by our countrymen.
The mother said but little; now and then,
A word or two of gossip there at home,
And news of births and marriages and deaths
She told us in a woman's way. I spoke
Of boyish pranks and mischiefs done at school,
Of books neglected, angry tutors foiled,
Nor failed to scatter Greek and Latin words
Throughout my talk, my learning to display.
But Isabel sat silent all the time:
While speaking, I could feel her eager eyes
Fixed closely on my face, but turning round
Toward her, she would drop them hurriedly.
When leaving, old Pedrarias said to me,
"Come back to see me here again, my lad;"
The mother sweetly said, "Yes, come again;"
And sweeter still, the eyes of Isabel
In love's own language pleaded, "Come again."

I often went again, but not one chance
Had I to speak with Isabel alone.
Her father, now preparing to return,
Could think of nothing but America,

While all my vagrant thoughts were Isabel's.
What did I care for all his fleets or forts,
His Indian fights, his chase of buccaneers?
But day by day, through sluggish hour to hour,
I listened as he drummed and drawled and droned;
Impatient, vexed and nervous, worn with words,
Turning, twisting and writhing in my chair,
I wondered if he ever would be done.
O, how I longed to speak with Isabel,
When all these garrulous people were away,
And she and I were all alone, alone!
She ever came and heard her father talk,
And saw me, restless, tossing in my chair,
But rarely spoke herself; and oftentimes
Her mother or her sire would bid her go
About some little task; then she would rise,
And with a sigh would leave me there alone
To breast the deluge of verbosity.

But one day, as I rose to leave her home,
She stole away ere I could say "Good-bye":
This pained me: for she had ever sought before
To linger near me till I went my way,
With wistful eyes imploring my return:
Now she had gone, letting me take my leave
Without one parting look, or word, or sigh!
But when I left the house and reached the gate,
Behind a myrtle bough I saw her stand.
No one was with her, no one followed me!
Her trembling fingers clasped a lovely rose;
She kissed it, then she tossed it into my hands;
Next, with the swiftness of a frightened fawn,
With something like a laugh and like a sob,
She fled, and vanished through the garden trees.

At night, oft would I loiter restlessly,
And spent with wakefulness, about the house
Her presence sanctified; despondingly
Mine eyes would search the windows for one
glimpse

Of her, my love, my sweet, my bonnibel.
Oft would the chancicleer's alarum clang
Through sylvan coverts, and the blushful East
Proclaim the dawn, ere I had turned with sighs,
Reluctant, and in languishment, away.
At twilight would I often linger, wan
With love and longing as the white-wing'd moths
That haunted the pale corollas of the dusk
To pilfer honeyed sweets; and on these eves,
Charged with its weight of youthly cares, my
breast

Would ache to feel itself an exile, barred
From climbing to her casement, and in bliss
Close-pressing to itself the one desired.

One evenfall impatiently I paced
The garden of her father's mansion. There
Alone and unespied I waited long.
The homing swallows caracoled on high,
Then vanished one by one. Soon lovely Day,
That azure-eyed, fair-haired Circassian slave,
Sank in the swart arms of her sultan, Night.
Ensanguined was the West; then ebon shades
Enshrouded all the glories of the world.
I watched to see the tiny candle beam
Forth from her window, with its timid ray
In whispered answer to the flaming stars
Besprent throughout the firmamental gloom
Like flambeaux lit in castle-towers of gods.

Old Earth, poetic with her evening dew,
And redolent with rarest fragrances
Of musk and frankincense from silken blooms,
Seemed like a sweet and gentle confidant,
A fond, indulgent mother-friend in need,
To aid me in mine amorous desire.
For lo! into her little oriel came,
Bearing a quivering taper in her hand,
The one I yearned to see,—my damosel!
My eager, hungry eyes saw that her face,
Like mine, was pale from vigils born of care.
Tall poplars, shimmering in the sparkling moon,
Guarded her window, which they half concealed,
So that she seemed a dryad of their boughs.
Most witching of all witching maids she shone,
Yet purest, as her pallid cheeks proclaimed.
Was love as yet unbudded in her breast?
Soon came mine answer,—joy ineffable!
For now she clasped a lute; with dulcet notes,
Sweeter than sweetest of nectarean dew
That ever moth at dusk from blossom thieved,
She warbled, and unbosomed all her soul.
With bliss I tingled. Cooingly she sang
This lyric that her midmost heart revealed:

“I love thee. I can say no more,
Yet, Sweet, I can not tell thee less:
My soul cries out; their secret lore
It bids my timid lips confess.

“In fear I knock upon thy gate:
Bid not thy suppliant depart!
See, in thy hands I lay my fate,
And underneath thy feet, my heart.

“Thy light and careless hands may fling
The gift I offer into dust;
Yet unto thee mine all I bring,
And trembling, in thy faith I trust.

“Though shipwrecked hearts by seas of tears
I see bestrewn from years of yore,
Blind to their fate, I hush my fears.
I love thee. I can say no more.”

On the next night, Pedrarias kept me late
With his old round of stories. When I left,
A full round moon was floating in the skies,
And sprinkling all the world with silvery snows;
A nightingale was warbling in the trees,
And sprinkling all the world with silvery songs.
Then close beside the path I saw her stand,
Half hidden by tall sprays of lily blooms,
Whose bosoms in the moongleams, like her face,
Seemed glowing with a pure, divine desire.
I rushed toward her, clasped her in my arms,
And felt her quick heart beating in her breast
Like a young linnet struggling in its cage.
I kissed her madly on her trembling mouth:
“I love thee: dost thou love me, Isabel?”
I panted in a whisper eagerly.
“Yes, yes!” she answered; then she tore herself
From out my arms and quickly disappeared.
I stood there breathless, quivering with delight,
My lips still warm from that delicious kiss,
My bosom bounding in ecstatic joy
At having felt the beating of its mate.
Roused from my dreams, I followed her. But no!
I could not find her. So I sought my inn,
My gladsome feet half-running all the way.

I tossed awake the whole night long. At morn
I sped to ask her father for her hand.
The old grandee, confounded, for a while
Seemed asking of himself, "Is this a dream?
How can this thing be real?" Then he woke
Out of his blank amazement with a burst
Of loud, contemptuous laughter. Suddenly
Ceasing to laugh, he faced me, white with rage.
"What! *Thou* demand my daughter's hand?" he
cried,
"Thou prig, thou popinjay! Ye saints in heaven,
What impudence is here! I lifted thee,
A beggar, without fortune, rank or name,
From depths of nothingness, and sought to make
A man of thee: vain toil and vain endeavor,
And ill-requited pains! For after all,
Such now is my reward!" My cheeks burned red
With shame and grief and anger, and I cried,
"Against me thou canst charge no graver crime
Than a lean purse, my lord. The name I bear,
Despite thy cynic scoff, is honored: yea!
My lineage is as ancient as thine own;
That well thou knowest." "Will this honored name
Fill out that flattened purse?" he sneered. "In wealth,"
I answered, "is not all that makes this life
Worthy to love and cling to. There are limits
To that which money buys." But he rejoined,
"Yea, there are bounds to the great benefits
That money brings you. But there is no end
To miseries that the *lack* of money brings."
"Without the one I love," I moaned, "my life
Were not so sweet as death. I still have leave
To serve my country with a loyal sword,
And there, before the enemy, that life

May not be given in vain." "Ha, ha!" he laughed, "Thou'lt live a long time yet. And thou'lt recover bravely from all this folly. And heed well This I now tell you: no man ever laid A violent hand on his own life, or sought To throw that life away at hands of others, Or rushed headlong to wild and desperate deeds, For a good woman. If he slays himself, Or goes inviting death, or slays another, Or steeps himself in shame, through maddened love, She whom he loves is evil. But the woman Whose soul is faithful, ever brings to man Peace, comfort and content. She sways his heart, But sways it only for his good. Then cease These threats of rash deeds when you prate of one As pure as Isabel."

With these last words
He turned his back and left me: then I went
My way in anguish. What a sudden change
From glorious gladness to that black despair!
My happy hopes fell from my orphaned heart
As falls autumnal foliage from the bough.
I wandered through the streets that day alone,
Blinded and dazed with grief, like a lost child
Far from its home and kindred.

Poverty

Had been the evil star that wrought this woe,
And bitterly my fortune I bewailed.
True, I had youth and vigor, which to some
Had been of priceless worth. But of what use
Were these gifts to me now? For as I stood,
So sturdy, young and rosy, yet so poor,

I was as one wrecked on a desert isle
With countless treasures in his grasp,—with gold,
Silver and precious stones he could not use,
But worthless to him as the sands he trod,—
Worthless to barter for a loaf of bread,
Or buy him sandals for his bleeding feet,
Or even a rag to hide his nakedness.

My grief was made more poignant when I learned
That many other suitors sought her hand,
Amongst whom were the handsome, rich and proud,
Young cavaliers of birth and eminence;
One was a kinsman of the king himself,
And mindful of his station. Seeing this,
What chance had I, a ward of charity,
Who owed his meagre schooling to her sire?
O, how I longed to pay that loathsome debt!
I prayed for independence, and I groaned,
“Save me from obligation to another!
Better to gnaw a mouldy bit of cheese
In your own narrow hovel, than to feast
On fatted peacocks in a patron’s hall.”

Cheerless, I faced the world without a friend,
For both my parents now had passed away,
Leaving no one to aid me. I had saved
Out of my pigmy hoard scarce half enough
To pay my old innkeeper’s little claim
For food and lodging, and I lacked for more
To buy me fit apparel. Oft I asked,
“Ah, why does Fate urge crabbed Poverty
To sneak behind us in his threadbare coat,
To spy upon us with an eye austere,
And dog our happy feet, when we are young?”

The dark days passed in anguish and despair,
And then Pedrarias sent for me again.
Astonished and perplexed, my thoughts whirled round,
Guessing to find his motive. In my heart
I hoped he had relented, and yet knew
Hope was but idle. Then I hastened forth,
And stood before him at his home. Not once
The old man spoke of Isabel; not once
He deigned to mention my rejected suit.
But in his smoothest silk-appareled phrase,
Unwonted in his former days, he purred,
"Young man, within a fortnight's time, my fleet
Weighs anchor to return to Darien.
Recalling how thy sire was once my friend,
I wish his son to be my comrade. So,
If thou wilt join thy fortunes unto mine,
A captain's post I tender unto thee,
A place of honor with a generous pay,
In a new world that proffers wealth and fame."
Amazed and overjoyed, I dallied not,
But eagerly accepted all the terms
Wherewith he hedged his offer. In my haste
I deemed it but another generous act
To prove his kindness for a comrade's son.
Ere many days his craft revealed itself
Through this apparent goodness. For indeed
His plan was simple: I should wend my way
Beyond the seas, and live in another world,
A thousand dreary leagues from Isabel;
A host of perils would confront me there;
There, in the end, perchance, would be my tomb;
Meantime, my señorita, left in Spain,
Surrounded by her gilded cavaliers,
And rich or titled suitors, might forget

Her old-time lover in his unknown grave
In unknown forests far beyond the sea.
How clearly was his cunning manifest!
Yet youth is ever trustful; so I sped
As happy as a bee in springtime blooms,
Dreaming that life was one long morn in May.

The last night came; we were to start at dawn
Upon our march to join the waiting fleet.
I saw my poor old landlord and his wife,
And paid my reckoning. Then the two kind souls
Gave me their blessing and much good advice.
The old dame, weeping, took me in her arms,
And since I had no mother, prayed aloud
That God would keep and guide the homeless boy.

I had not heard from Isabel as yet,
Nor had I seen her since that Night of nights
Whose transitory bliss was now as dust.
I chafed and sighed, impatient of delay;
I plotted, schemed, and used all stratagems
To see her, or to reach her by a letter,
Yet never with success. But on that eve
Of our departure came a messenger,
Bearing a missive in Maria's hand.
This elder sister, once the promised bride
Of brave Balboa, lord of Darien,
Had since that time retreated from the world,
A disappointed, love-eluded soul.
Her ready eye had fathomed Isabel,
Who poured her girlish secret out with tears,
And begged the older sister for her aid.
The letter said, "Come thou this very night
To speak with her you love a few last words:"

So at the hour appointed there I stood.
Maria, with a black mantilla thrown
In gloomy folds around her pensive face,
Stole forward as I reached the garden gate,
And pointed out the spot where Isabel
Was waiting for me. That same place it was
Where first I kissed her, and first told my love.
The moon was glowing in the skies again,
But not a nightingale sang in the trees,
And all the sprays of starry lily-blooms
Drooped dry and withered. In this old-time scene,
So faded from the beauty of its past,
Once more I rushed and clasped her in my arms,
Kissing her wildly over and over again.
But we had met in anguish, not in joy:
She sobbed and sobbed: my little best I did
To reconcile her to our hapless fate.
A thousand times we swore that we were true,
And promised one another still to keep
Our pledges to the ending of the world.
She knew that in my absence every plot,
And every guileful ruse and crafty scheme
The cunning of duennas might devise,
Would now be brought in use to break her troth:
She knew that threats and promises and wiles
For months and years incessant siege would lay
Unto her bosom's lonely citadel.
But still she cried, "None other will I love;
No other lad shall have my heart or hand!"
I promised to return in little time,
With gold and glory, pomp, and praise of men.
So then we parted in a storm of grief.
Ah, little did we think what weary years
Would perish ere we two should meet again!

Now we were young; but when we next should meet,
Youth would be ended, half our lives be gone!

I was to face the savage with his spear,
The ocean gale, the tropic hurricane,
The ravenous wild beast and the pestilent marsh,
The awful earthquake, the volcano's flame.
The desert and the mountain and the sea
Would spread with half a world to sever us:
Drought, Famine, Fire and War would plot together
With all the malice of revengeful gods,
To make us tread forever more apart.

BOOK V

De Soto's narrative continued—He accompanies Pedrarias to Darien—Aspects of Darien—Flowers, birds and animals abounding in the wilds—Pedrarias, by a message sent through Perez, orders De Soto to burn an Indian Village—De Soto refuses—Perez, through the machinations of Pedrarias, challenges De Soto—De Soto offers to make amends, but without success—The duel with Perez—Espinosa, second to Perez—Hernandez, second to De Soto—De Soto is victor in the duel—Perez quits his post, and returns to Spain—De Soto repays the debt of his father to Pedrarias—Combats with the chief Uracca—Pedrarias, jealous of De Soto, sends him with Hernandez on an expedition to the North, hoping that mischance may befall him there—Nicaragua, Guatemala and Yucatan—Lakes and mountains—Great volcanoes—Earthquakes—Ancient ruins of unknown peoples—Gil Gonzalez—The battle at Torebo—Treachery of Gonzalez—His flight, imprisonment and death—De Soto and Hernandez found the Cities of Leon and Granada—Hernandez seeks to convert the Indians to the Christian faith—Rumors of the downfall of Pedrarias—De Soto warns Hernandez against him, but without effect—Pedrarias comes to Leon—He causes Hernandez to be beheaded—Pedrarias attempts the life of De Soto also, but De Soto defies him and quits his service.

I HASTE through the annals of our life at sea,—
The languid calms succeeding fearful storms,
The waiting and the watching, day by day,
Through dreary wastes of ocean wilderness,

When one despairs of sighting land again.
At last we reached our new home; safe ashore,
We looked about us with astonished eyes.

The land of Darien, like a zone of green,
Divides the azure of unwedded seas.
Low lies the coast and sandy, but a range
Of mountains undulates along the midst,
So with a trivial ten-league's breadth, this realm
Wearies the traveler with such devious paths
That one day's journey lengthens out to five.
He who would venture on that arduous trail
Must drag through tangled swamps, wade mountain
 brooks,
Toil through the jungles, and pant up cliffs and
 crag.

The forests overarch with giant trees:
Prodigious branches, interlaced above,
Exile the light of brilliant tropic skies,
Making an emerald twilight of the noon.
Gigantic vines, like monster serpent-coils,
Twist round and round, with verdant festooned
 leaves,

And choke the life from many a mighty bole.
A million creepers throw their tendrils out,
And braced with myriad hairy feet, they climb,
Hanging great sprays of red and yellow blooms,
Or fragrant azure clusters. In those woods
Are wondrous orchids, imaging the forms
Of other fair created things,—with blooms
Star-petaled, or like wings of butterflies,
Or sculptured like white-bosomed doves. And some
Are crimson, others golden, some rich brown,
These dappled, and those dotted like the throats

Of speckled thrushes, while the loveliest,
Of royal purple with a ruby tinge,
Seem flakes of red and violet clouds of dawn.
What gorgeous beings lift their radiant plumes
In those deep wildwoods! And surpassing all,
The trogons of that tropic wilderness
Flit glorious in their hues of golden-green
And brilliant carmine: these resplendent birds
Can not be tamed, nor bear captivity,
But ever droop and die when caged; so thus
The trogon in the red man's creed became
The Spirit of Freedom. Orient humming-birds,
Decked as in emeralds, with ruby throats,
Glint through the green night swift as meteors.
Here are macaws with glowing scarlet robes,
Others of saffron breast and sky-blue wing,
And flying parrots green as flying leaves.
Quaint throngs of little sportive, jabbering apes
Go scampering through the overhanging boughs.
Smooth, slender jaguars, garbed in silken furs
Thick-spotted like the peacock with his eyes,
Gracefully glide on stealthy velvet feet.
Each river swarms with hideous crocodiles;
Huge serpents twist in labyrinthine coils
Through the dark tangled swamps and dismal fens.
The air hangs heavy with the sickly taint
Of pestilence; and he who treads that land
Knows every breath he draws is charged with fate,
While every step is overhung by death.
Such is the land of Darien—fated clime,
Where human suffering bears its bitterest fruit.
Its blood and tears, commingled in one storm,
Would bring a second deluge on the world.

I had not long sojourned upon that shore
Ere I discovered that the viceroy planned
My downfall. For, within a fortnight's time
After we disembarked, there came to me
A captain of his guard. Tall was the man,
Meagre and sallow, with a snaky eye
That gleamed in black malignance. Loftily
He glanced upon me; then in lordly tones,
"Alonzo Perez is my name," he said,
"And I bear orders from Pedrarias.
Westward three leagues, upon the river-bank
Beneath that peak,—the highest that you see
Here from your casement,—stands an Indian town
Whose chief refuses tribute. You must rouse
Your troop at dawn, march to the town, and set
The torch to every wigwam. If the braves
Remonstrate, heed them not; if they resist,
Smite them, and spare thou not the babe in arms,
The beldame or the graybeard, man or woman."

Amazed, I answered, "Harsh commands are these!
Pedrarias lightly bids me do a deed
Fit for a felon's, not a soldier's hand."
The sallow cheek of Perez flushed: "Indeed,
A most precocious lad thou art!" he cried.
"What knowest thou of savage nature? What
Of savage warfare? Shall an unfledged youth
Rebuke our leader, who, through years of toil
Learned his hard lesson ere that youth was born?"
I knew not then that Perez bore a name
Dark as his master's for the ready use
Of torch and blade. Thus I unknowingly
Had pricked a tender nerve. And now again
I answered him, "True, I have only youth

To set against experience: yet I know
A kind hand oft without a contest wins,
Where an uplifted fist may lose its fight
After a needless quarrel. Strength and power
Bide more in moderation than in fury."
He showed his white teeth through his bearded lips,
Sneering, "Ha, ha! Are we at school, with you
For our schoolmaster? Must each veteran, bronzed
By tropic suns, and scarred with fifty wounds,
Learn warfare from each coxcomb fresh from Spain,
Fit only for fandangoes, serenades,
And conquests over ladies' hearts? And now,
Sir gallant, take this bit of truth from me:
Nothing in life is ever truly learned
Save through experience. We may hear from others
Things we believe; but realizing not
Their poignant truth, their lessons we refuse,
Till face to face we meet them, and perforce
Heed their hard precepts. Doubtless you are wise
In parlor tactics. But they serve you not
With the barbarian in his native wild."

"You would destroy him, not subdue," I cried.
"Conquest is not extermination; that
Is work for butchers, not for warriors." "So,"
He snapped retorting, "you would have us meet
The savage, not with musket or with sword,
But with pomatum and rose-water, musk,
Face-powder, satin cloaks and silken fans,
As gifts of peace? I tell you, every deed
Of kindness done a savage only puffs
That savage with more insolence. Each gift
Bestowed upon him, to his thought becomes
Proof that you fear him. But two arguments,

One steel, the other fire, convince him. Still,
 You will refuse, sir, to obey? Is that
 Your answer to the viceroy?" "Yea, it is,"
 I answered warmly. "So I thought. I go
 To bear your answer. If Pedrarias be
 The man I think him, you shall hear of this
 Again, and in a fashion you shall rue."
 With this last threat, he turned, and strode away.

He took my message, and Pedrarias,
 (So one who heard them told me afterward),
 Eyed the tall captain closely, tossed his head,
 And answered, "If the youngster will not go,
 Go then thyself. Thou canst perform the task
 Better than he." But Perez in amaze
 Sharply retorted, "Wilt thou let this brat
 So lightly disobey thee? Wilt thou bear
 With a bowed head his insults?" Then the other
 Rejoined, "I care not for his idle words.
 Thou knowest that the gossips croak of thee,
 More than of me, as one who falters not
 In dealing with the infidel. The boy
 Dares not offend me. Unto thee, not me,
 His words were spoken. Doubtless, then, his thrust
 Was aimed at thee alone. But now this work
 Remains undone, and some one must perform it:
 Have thy band ready, then, to march at dawn."

"If he may disobey thee, so may I,"
 Perez exclaimed; "I will not go. And yet
 Shameful it is, that one who rules this land
 Demands no satisfaction for such wrongs."
 Again the despot eyed him coolly, saying,
 "Captain, his insults were addressed to thee,

Not me; and they were meant for thee, not me.
Besides, my age and rank forbid that I
Should call him to account. Thou art still young:
If thou canst bear the upstart's insolence,
An old man like myself may well refrain
From seeking satisfaction at his hands."

Then Perez challenged me. Dazed with surprise,
I said to Espinosa, who had come
Bearing his message, "What does this mean? How
Have I offended him? I fight no man
To whom I bear no enmity." "Then sir,"
Said Espinosa curtly, "thou shouldst pause
Ere uttering speeches that rouse enmity."
"Tell me your meaning," I replied; "what words
Of mine have touched his honor?" "Dost thou wish,"
He asked, "to have repeated unto thee
The words that thou hast used this very day?"
Still more confounded, I rejoined, "Those words
Affected but the viceroy and myself.
This man and I were strangers till this day,
And being strangers, I could meet him not
In hatred. Yet his scornful words to me
Might well have roused mine anger, had I not
Desired to shun a quarrel." "Thou hast heard
The message," Espinosa growled: "what answer
Hast thou to send?" Then I, "No answer yet
To him or thee I give. I must have time.
This is an idle tiff, deserving not
The weight he gives it. Come at noon to-morrow;
Then my response I give thee." So he left.

I had so lately reached that land, I stood
Unknown, and scarce could claim a friend: but one,

One only, of the cavaliers had deigned
To come to me with words of welcome. He,
Hernandez de Cordova, stood in rank
Next to Pedrarias. Gentle in his air,
Soft in his speech, pious in all his thoughts,
His goodness oft seemed weakness. But I knew
None other who would serve me, and I sought
His kindly offices. Telling him all,
I added, "No man will I shun through fear;
But yet I shrink from bloodshed where no cause
For anger lies. Speak to this man, and say
I never wished him ill; that I wish not
To meet him now in rancor: that I wait,
Hoping to hear him own his error." Long
Hernandez sate in silence; then he said,
"Thine embassy I take, but much I fear
It will be fruitless. For Pedrarias,
Planning thy ruin, set this snare. He knew
Thy censure was for him, and yet he turned
Its edge on Perez. In the Spanish host
No swordsman hath the skill of him who now
Hath challenged thee. Seven combats hath he
fought,
And ever victorious, he hath slain each foe,
Or made him beg for life. So thou, so young,
And so unskilled, Pedrarias hopes, wilt prove
An easy victim to this master-hand.
Alas! I fear his hopes may not prove false;
But I will stay the conflict if I can."
"In other days," I said, "I too have learned
A little swordsmanship, though not for months
Have I essayed it. I will meet this man
If he still stands offended. Yet if thou
Canst calm his foolish anger, I am pleased."

Hernandez left me. He returned ere long
With a grave air. "Perez will not relent,"
He told me, "for the man is deeply stung,—
More by the viceroy's words than yours. Besides,
Firmly assured of victory, he exults
In dreams of new-won laurels at your cost.
I argued with him earnestly: each time
I showed his reasoning faulty, he would meet
Mine answer with some new complaint. For one
Who seeks another's downfall never lacks
In reasons; and as fast as each proves false,
He still invents new reasons endlessly."
"Then let it be," I said. "I like it not:
The fault is his. But if we must, we must."
And then Hernandez with a doleful sigh,
Answered, "Yes, yes, my lad, we must. But still,
Thou art so young and inexpert, while he,
A skillful veteran,—" "Be of cheer!" I laughed,
"I am no suckling babe. He may yet rue
The day he crossed me. At the worst, I die
Only a few days ere the time assured."

We met next morning in a little glade
Of the great forest near our city's walls.
Though the hour was early, yet the tropic sun
Glared fiercely. From the verdant boughs above
Monstrous lianas hung with crimson blooms,
And through the foliage startled parrots flew,
Chattering and screaming. From the deep dark
glooms
Of the vast woods beyond, ceaselessly whirled
The buzz and chirp of myriad insects. Here
A motley crowd had gathered,—men and boys,
Spaniards and Indians, peasants, cavaliers,

Idlers and vagabonds. Some climbed the trees,
Crowding upon the limbs to find a place
Best to observe the conflict. Perez came
With Espinosa as his second, I
With good Hernandez. Stripping to the waist,
My foe upreared sinewy and muscular,
With a gaunt arm outreaching mine. Yet still
I was the younger, and in nimbleness,
I thought, surpassed him. But I saw at once
That the crowd favored Perez. Some through fear
Either of him or of Pedrarias,
Cheered when he came: still others, confident
That he would prove triumphant, and desiring
The good-will of the victor, shook his hand,
And wished him good fortune. As I approached,
Some urchins laughed and jeered. Young cavaliers,
Brilliant in golden lace and scarlet sashes,
Bowed to me stiffly. Even those who seemed
To favor me, would gravely shake their heads,
As if in pity at my certain fate.

We fought with rapiers. Perez came with smiles,
Easily confident. But as our swords
Whistled and hissed, and flashed in fiery curves,
With neither drawing blood, his look betrayed
Vexation and amazement. Still time passed,
And as the glittering weapons clicked and clashed,
While yet his boy-antagonist fought on,
He burned with fierce impatience. But at last,
Sweating and panting, and reddening in the heat,
Both of us reeled exhausted. "We will rest,"
He said, and I assented. Rising soon,
Again we battled. In a little time,
Losing my guard, his rapier, like a wasp,

Stung my right arm: quickly the blood outstreamed,
Though the wound was not deep: seeing the blood
Drawn first by Perez, loudly the rabble cheered.
He smiled with cynic pleasure, but his joy
Betrayed him; for he lost his vigilance,
And then I reached his shoulder with a gash
Doubly avenging my own wound. Through rage
We both became incautious; soon each stood
Streaming with blood from temple unto thigh.
Wildly the rapiers circled round and round,
Or darted forward, whining angrily
Like maddened hornets. Closing in together,
Near and still nearer, with one frenzied crash
Sword smote on sword anigh the hilt, and then,
Snapping apart, the slender blades were thrown,
Whirling and singing through the air, to fall,
Clanking, upon the ground afar.

And now

Hernandez rushed between us, crying, "Stay!
Both are disarmed. Both knights have proved themselves
Skillful and brave. Let them cease battling. Come:
Let there be peace between them." But the crowd,
Deeming this but a sign of weakness, jeered
At the kind offer, and Perez himself,
Vexed that a boy had proved his match, exclaimed,
"Never! He wronged me, and must pay the cost.
Bring us more swords." And so the swords were
brought.

Still fiercer waxed the combat, as our blades
Shivered and shocked together furiously.
Perez grew wild with anger; seeing this,

I summoned all my prudence to my aid.
His breath came hard, although his reddened eyes
Showed unabated fury. Slowly now
He weakened; thrust on thrust I gave him, while
His tilts I parried. We had fought two hours,
And the crowd saw the untried youth had gained
Point after point. So then the servile crew
Ceased to deride and hoot me: by and by,
A few even dared to cheer me. As the swords,
Whizzing together, spat their sparks of fire,
Breathless, the multitude watched on. In time
His passes clacked and clacked against my steel
As harmless as the beat of castanets.
I reached his right arm with a forward lunge,
So it dropped useless; high in air his blade
Flew round and round, then glittering in the sun,
And sinking far beyond the shouting throng,
Thumped to the ground. Now Perez, overcome,
Staggered; then like a slaughtered ox he fell.
Some moments he lay motionless; but soon,
Lifting his head, he groaned. Putting my sword
Unto his breast, "Beg for thy life!" I cried.
"No, not from thee," he growled: "death would be
better
Than a life owed to thee. Strike! I flinch not."
"The life not worth the asking," I declared,
"Is not worth taking." So I sheathed my sword,
And strode away. And then the slavish crowd
Followed me, loudly huzzahing. But I spurned
These new-made friends, the courtier-swarms that
throng
To greet the favorite when Good Fortune smiles:
Much do they love their monarch of an hour!
They worship the success, and not the man.

Divested of his peacock feathers of pride,
The captain left our army, sailed for home,
And never after was his sallow face
Flushed by the flames of burning villages.

Slowly the years passed. After many days
Of toil and hardship I had saved a hoard
To quit the old debt that my father owed
The viceroy for our schooling. Then the whole,
With ample usury, at last I paid.
But though the old man loved the clink of gold,
And though his eyes lit with a joyful gleam
Of welcome to his ducats home again
With all their duteous earnings, still he sighed,
Like a slavemaster parting from his slave,
To set me, with his full acquittance, free.
Well knew he that the chain which galls the most,
And binds the bondman surest, is of gold!

Pedrarias and his spies through all these days
Kept closest watch upon me; but in truth
I was none faultier for their jealous gaze.
Mine own life was not blameless, and their eyes,
Forever on me, guarded me from deeds
Which else had done scant justice to my fame.

Although I love my friend, still let me yield
This tribute to thy worth, mine enemy!
Unjust thou art, perchance, no doubt unkind,
Yet much I owe to thee, stern monitor!
Faults though thou hast, due honor shall be thine.
Close, keen-eyed critic, oft thy scrutiny
Hath made me blush defenceless, and in shame
Turn from my darling idols. Thou hast set

Full oft in paths of righteousness my feet,
That else had wandered in forbidden ways,
Lovely yet treacherous, and thy censure harsh
Hath oft rebuked my days of dalliance
In pleasant fields where pitfalls hid in flowers
Awaited with their secret perils. Yea,
Thy sneer hath been a sword to prod me on
To duty; it hath been a goading spur
To make me win a race I counted lost.
Thy jeer hath oft aroused me till I swore
To reach success despite thy prophecies
Of my defeat; thy challenge, like a blast
Of trumpets when the battle hangs in doubt,
Hath nerved my hand to snatch the victor's wreath
That else had never graced my brows. Again,
Amidst my pæans sung by parasites,
Thy frown from mien austere remindeth me
That I am merely mortal, child of dust,
Soon summoned unto strict account. Stern friend,
Not thine to soothe with silken flatteries,
Nor gloze with unctuous phrases; it is thine
To do much more—*to save me from myself!*

For many moons a fruitless warfare raged
Between Pedrarias and a native chief,
By name Uracca; this barbarian king,
Resourceful and sagacious, foiled him well.
One day the Christians strove in bloody fight
Against the cohorts of this forest lord:
I, with my band, had not yet joined the rest,
But Espinosa with his cavalry
Charged on the paynims, who fled terrified,
For not one dusky brave in all that horde
In all his days had seen a steed before.

Soon were they still more terrified to hear
The roar of muskets. But with cheering words,
Uracca rallied them; scattered, they crouched
In brushwood of a steep and rocky hill,
Safeguarded by a rushing stream below.
From ambush there, darts whistled and hissed and
sang,

Till scores of brave Castilians strewed the field.
Fiercely the sun blazed; fast from every pore
The sweat came trickling. Tangling round their feet,
Lianas threw our soldiers headlong. There,
As the men struggled to rise, swift arrows flew,
And pinned them to the ground. Shamefully then
The rest took flight. As with my band I rode
Toward the field of conflict, I beheld,
For the first time, the horrors of battle. Men,
Dusty, bareheaded, and splashed over with blood,
Rushed by us, maddened with unmanly fright.
Oft from the bodies of these hurrying wretches
Bristled the feathered reeds whose flints had pierced
them.

Our horses reared and snorted as we passed
Corses of other soldiers, whose glazed eyes,
Wide-open, stared against the dazzling sun
Unflinching, and whose mouths from ear to ear
Stretched open likewise, as though even in death
They shouted for help. Now still more thickly spread
The victims of the battle. By the path,
Tossing or kicking or throwing up their hands,
Many strewed writhing in their agonies.
Loud groans besieged our ears. My frightened steed
Shied as a wretch, directly in our path,
Rose on one arm, shuddered, and then fell back,
Dead as a block of stone.

Beaten, but still

Haughty as ever, Espinosa came
Leading the rear. The wild barbarian host
Followed him, fiercely shouting. "Come, my lads!"
I cried, and then we charged the savages.
Our firearms mowed their lines, and with our swords
Whirling in fiery circles round our heads,
We rode amongst them, trampling underfoot
Or hewing down the pagans who had dared
To stand their ground. The others took to flight,
Scampering about the field in scattered throngs.
I galloped back to Espinosa. "Come,"
I said, "the day can yet be saved. Why not
Return, and meet the heathen once again?
We may sweep down their cohorts, if we rush
Upon them ere they swim the stream, and scale
The height again." But though I had saved his
band,
He hated me the more for thus deserving
His gratitude. He eyed me sullenly,
Answering, "Follow my orders. Thou shouldst know
Thy duty is obedience, not command."
So saying, he persisted in retreat.

Pedrarias took the field himself, but strove
In vain to force Uracca to his terms.
The wary Indian, shunning open war,
Ambushed and smote our troopers: day by day,
Still greater inroads on our strength he made.
So then, crestfallen at his plans gone wrong,
The viceroy let his dreams of conquest die.
I sought Pedrarias, and I said, "Our troops
Murmur at orders to retreat. My lord,
Let me but lead with chosen cavalry

Into the enemy's country, and we yet
Our losses may retrieve. Let us but go,
And if we win, you win. But if we lose,
We will bear all the obloquy alone."
The tyrant scowled upon me, thundering, "No!
I am a veteran; thou a callow boy;
What knowest thou of plans of warfare? Cease
This constant intermeddling, and begone."

Now on his head our soldiers heaped the blame
For all these late disasters: every tongue
Acclaimed me for the counsels I had given
To face the enemy, and win or lose.
At this, the viceroy, stung with jealousy,
Hated me more and more. And thus it was,
Of past and future mindful, he resolved
To send me on a mission far away
With good Hernandez, whom he likewise hated,
But who, as well he knew, mistrusting not
The motives of the despot, would, like wax,
Be moulded in obedience to his will.
No sadder spectacle this life affords
Than that it shows us when some good weak man
Bends under the finger of some bad strong man!

He called us to his presence: when we came
Into his palace, we beheld him perched
Before a table, in a little room
Whose walls were hung with maps in red and green
And yellow, threaded over here and there
With lines of black or brown, showing the isles,
The continents, mountains, rivers and seas
Of this new western world. Still other maps
Lay spread before him. "I have called you here,"

He said, "to take your new commands. Of late
From Nicaragua comes an urgent cry
For succor from us. I have raised a fleet
To bear you thither. There you land your force,
And take possession for the Spanish king.
Now, Gil Gonzalez, an adventurer,
The leader of a wild marauding band,—
Deserters from the ranks in Mexico,—
Hath overrun that country, sea to sea.
Ye are commanded to disperse his horde,
And make the realm a colony of Spain:
Ye likewise are commanded to explore
In Guatemala and in Yucatan,
Noting their harbors, rivers, roads and towns,
Their tribes, the modes of warfare of those tribes,
And all things that our lord, the king, should know
To conquer and to rule the realms." So now
I was again to go in banishment.
Pedrarias feared my stay in Darien
Would bring me added strength to shake his power,
And knowing well the dangers of those lands
Where he now sent me, hoped ere many days
To greet the welcome tidings of my death.

Leaving his presence, all my discontent,
Unrest and apprehension at this change,
I muttered to Hernandez. "Come, my lad,"
He answered in his easy, trustful way,
"Submit. Better it is, as thou shalt learn,
Now, in thy youth, to know adversity,
Hardship and suffering, than to meet them first
In thy late manhood. Should the fruit-tree brave
Hoarfrost and bleak winds in the early year,
Later it buds and blooms and bears its fruit

In safety. But if south winds and the sun
Lure it to flowering ere its season comes,
Belated gusts of winter sweep at last,
Nipping the blossom and the unborn fruit.
Better that early frost than empty boughs
Or blighted clusters at the gathering-time
In Summer and in Autumn!"

So he droned
His consolations in mine ear. Next morn
He marched us to our ships, and we set sail,
A tiny, motley crew, for northern realms.

These neighboring kingdoms unto Darien
Are haunts of terror and sublimity.
Gigantic forests clothe gigantic peaks,
And like prodigious emerald necklaces
Surround great lakes of brilliant sapphire blue:
Around these lakes the fierce volcanoes rise,
Like fell, ferocious Titans, thunder-scarred.
Some belch their black smoke like a cyclops' forge,
Some blot out heaven with sombre ashen clouds,
Some spatter boiling rivers down their seams,
Some vomit lava in a crimson flood,
And some hurl white-hot rocks and fiery dust.
They shout in thunder and they glare in flame,
And as they quiver in their awful wrath,
The whole world, like a child, shrinks back in fear,
And trembles with terrific earthquake throes.

Bells toll in steeples where no human hand
Puts forth to ring them; great cathedral walls
Come crashing down to the ground, and overwhelm
Under their ruins frantic multitudes

Whose shrieks they smother into silence. Birds
Are stifled by the ashes and the fumes,
And fall like dead leaves headlong from the skies.
Wild beasts forsake their highland fastnesses
In rocky dens and caverns, or their lairs
Amidst the jungle's deep untrodden glooms,
Trembling with terror, and into homes of men
Creep tamed and whining. Everlasting hills
Seem sick men writhing in convulsive spasms:
The mountains rock and quiver: ocean-waves
Dash wildly on the promontory's brow.
Keen lightnings round the lofty craters glitter:
The sun turns red, grows murky, disappears.
With wrench on wrench and frightful quake on quake
The heavens and the earth seem gulfed together.
Stupendous chasms yawn; in awful pangs
The hoarse-voiced subterranean thunder roars;
Explosion on explosion rends the peaks
With great concussions that the mariner
Feels on his bark an hundred leagues at sea.
Amidst the din of houses tumbling down,
The sickening shocks, the suffocating dust,
And the deep darkness veiling earth and heaven,
Women and men, bewildered, agonized,
And lifting feeble rushlights in their hands,
Rush to and fro, crying the names of friends
Now lost or dead. But through that sulphurous pall
Their tapers glimmer but a cubit's length,
And none can find his comrade. On their heads
They scatter dust, or on their shoulders bear
The weight of heavy crosses for their sins.
And quivering through that midnight of despair,
One hears the deep-toned chanting of the priest,
While frenzied mortals, barefoot, grimed with soot,

In rags and tatters, with disheveled hair,
With white lips, and with wild distended eyes,
Delirious in their madness, supplicate,
And shriek to God to save them from their doom.

Then often in eruption, peak to peak
Seems to respond with human sympathy;
Like blind and wounded giants racked with pains,
Chained down with Satan in the lakes of fire,
Each calls his comrade, and each answers each,
Lamenting in the agonies of hell.

Among the ancient forests there are trees
Whose age none know but God and angels; yet
Their hoary years are but as morns of youth
To those of ruins they have overgrown.
Here stand gray columns of old palaces
Enormous in their girth, of towering height,
Where kings and queens reigned in forgotten times,
And spoke in mystic, long-forgotten tongues,
Of old forgotten hates, forgotten loves,
Forgotten glories, griefs and pains and joys.
Here banquet chambers rear their marble walls;
Their moss-grown tablets, carved with signs unknown,
Seem ever striving helplessly to speak,
And tell us of the shining, splendid deeds
Done in their day, when ancient Earth was young.
Here lift poetic temples in decay,
Where stately shrines of unremembered gods
Await in vain the smoke of sacrifice,
The votive chaplet and the suppliant's knee.
The great, strange, awful idols seem to stare,
Majestic in displeasure and surprise,
Because no flock, nor herd, is ever brought

To stain their lichened altars red with blood,
And never comes a warrior armed and plumed,
To pray for victory on the battlefield,
Nor maid to beg a lover, nor a wife
Imploring that they open up her womb.
The patient ants creep through their sightless eyes,
And the birds nest within their ruined mouths.

In these wild regions, through the years to come
We were to face the savage bow and spear
At every mountain pass; here we should brave
The fang of beast and serpent in the depths
Of every jungle. Here the earth should quake
Beneath us, and the heights rain fire above.
Here we should front the strongest foe of man,
Nature, stern Nature, armed with tenfold power
In this, her strongest stronghold of the world.

Though meek and pious, yet Hernandez lacked
In martial force and ardor. To our faith
He sought to lead the savage: in his train
Swarmed priests and friars: laying the sword aside,
Long hours he spent in fasting and in prayer.
Gonsalez, like a wily Pharisee,
Aped all the virtues that so graced the life
Of our own leader, and eclipsed his fame
For pious deeds. But like some glowing fruit,
Crimson and golden, good to view, and yet
With a worm hidden in its rotting heart,
His pomp of piety, brilliant without,
Proved but the foulness, not the wholesomeness,
Of that within. Christening in one short year
Some two-score thousand naked savages,
He at the same time eased them of their gold.

A glorious booty from their hands he wrung:
With toys and trinkets, buttons, beads or knives,
Brass ear-rings, cheap and gaudy handkerchiefs,
He bartered for their goblets, cups and rings,
Or chains and bracelets, wrought of solid gold:
Truly his piety and love of pelf
Joined hands, and worked together for his good!

Hernandez bade me seek Gonsalez out,
Demanding that his lawless rule should end.
With fifty men I reached a little town,—
Torebo it was called,—camped for the night,
And knowing that Gonsalez not afar
Was lurking, I resolved, when morning came,
To seek and find him. In the skies that night
A full moon floated radiant, till a cloud,
Vasty and black, like a great dragon, rose,
Seeming to swallow in its monstrous jaws
The splendent silvery orb. Gonsalez then,
Taking advantage of the treacherous gloom,
Attacked us with an overwhelming horde.
Roused from our sleep, we charged them: lifting
shouts,
And smiting with our sabres right and left,
We drove them in a howling pack before us.
Confused, confounded, stumbling through the dark,
They fought and slew each other, raging wild.
Gonsalez, facing sure defeat, now set
The snares to trip my feet again. He knew
That other followers soon would come to aid him,
And so, to filch a little time, he cried,
“Peace, peace! I charge you, in the king’s name,
peace!”
I then rode near him, and demanded, “Why

Disturbest thou thy monarch's provinces?"

"I am a loyal subject," cried he: "all
My deeds were done in service of the crown;
Legions of natives have I baptized; realms
And subjects have I brought to Church and State."

Now in the distance I could faintly hear
Shouts, and I noted, by the torches' glare,
That false Gonsalez pricked his ears, alert,
So, when the shouts repeated, nearer grown,
He answered with an anxious cry. Ere long,
Galloping hoofs we heard, and then, like a storm,
The dastard's other troopers rushed among us,—
Two hundred Indians, fifty men of Spain.
Then, like some master-actor on the stage,
Who in one moment doffs one character,
And takes another, differing afar,
The shrewd arch-traitor in one instant changed,
So I scarce knew him for the selfsame man.
"We have them now!" he thundered; "kill the dogs!
On, on! Down with the traitors! Seize them all!"
They rushed upon us; soon was heard the clash
Of brand that shattered brand, of battle-axe
That smote on ringing armor; by our ears,
Like flying serpents sped the steely darts,
Angrily hissing. Through the tenfold gloom
The firearms flashed red lightnings, while their roar,
Like the deep bay of bloodhounds in pursuit
Of some affrighted creature, through the hills
Rumbled and echoed with redoubled fury.
Outnumbered seven to one, fiercely we fought,
But vainly: for our men on foot they seized,
Binding them fast as prisoners: then they rushed
Upon me and my cavaliers, and sought

To drag us from our horses. But we swung
Our swords about us manfully, and hacked
And hewed the arms and hands they laid upon us,
So the rogues yelled with pain, and fled, or fell
Mangled, to writhe beneath the horses' hoofs.
Thus, drenched with blood, a fearful lane we cut
Through the wild shrieking, struggling multitude,
And spurred our steeds in safety from the field.

Ere noon, I sought Hernandez: earnestly
I begged him for another force, to smite
The craven who had shown such treachery.
Hernandez, vacillating still, refused;
Vexed though I was, what could I do but yield?
But now Gonzalez stood in evil plight;
With the dead lay his hundred bravest men.
Ceasing his bandit warfare, soon he fled,
A hunted outlaw, unto Mexico;
There he was captured; sent to Spain in bonds,
Before the twelve month's end, disgraced, he died.

From sun to sun I went about my task
To win Hernandez undisputed sway.
Success came quickly; all our hopes were blest:
Two towns, Leon, and next, Granada, rose
By the land-locked shores of Nicaraguan lakes.
There hardy Spanish settlers flocked in time:
From Darien wandered many, to escape
The harsh oppression of its despot's rule.

Now in these days insistent rumors rose,
Which whispered that Pedrarias, having lost
The favor of the king, was doomed to fall,
And that a new viceroy had sailed from Spain

To dispossess him. Hearing all these things,
Pedrarias then determined to sail North,
Depose Hernandez, seize the reins himself,
Deny us credit for the good achieved,
Claim as his own the harvest of our toils,
And so regain his royal master's grace.

These tidings reached mine ears, and so in haste
I sought Hernandez. At his much-loved work
I found him,—teaching youthful savages
The doctrines of our faith. I told him all
That I had heard, warning him anxiously.
He listened in amaze, and then he asked,
“Why should he wish to wrong me? Have I not
Been ever faithful to our lord, the King?
Hath not my rule been just and mild? Do not
The natives love me? Have not thousands come
And knelt at the altars of our holy church?
Friend am I not of every man of Spain?
Why should the viceroy wish to do me harm?”
“Not duty left undone, but duty done,
Raises up enemies for the righteous man,”
I answered him. “Bethink thee, how this wretch
Ever hath proved the foe of innocence!
O, thou art blindly trustful: let thine eyes
Be opened. If thy life is dear to thee,
Good friend, I beg thee, be upon thy guard.”
He answered, half impatient, “Come, my lad,
Thy love for me hath made thee overzealous.
My hero of Torebo is too rash:
Thy youthful ardor curb: all will be well.”
Thereat he waved his hand and turned away.
Calling a friar and an Indian boy,
He opened a book, and in a little while

His pious labors were resumed. I chafed
And fretted, but stood powerless. So then,
Seeing my warnings held for naught, I watched
The viceroy's movements with an anxious heart.

At last Pedrarias came; around him thronged
A ravenous crew of desperate buccaneers,
Who, having left all Darien despoiled,
Sought now to forage in another field.
Hernandez, learning this, hastened at once
To meet the viceroy; but he went alone,
I being retarded by some trivial call.
He reached the square of Leon; there, amazed,
He saw a motley crowd assembled. Lo!
High on a dais, in a massive chair,
He spied Pedrarias: guards, armed heavily,
Were thronged around him: further from his chair,
Headed by Espinosa, as of old,
Were gathered desperadoes, vagabonds,
And all the hard-faced vandals of his horde.
Close to the viceroy, by a wooden block,
There stood a headsman of gigantic size,
With a hideous face, a thick and brutal neck,
And monstrous hairy arms and hands, that wielded
A great sword that Goliath might have swayed.
Around all these, a crowd of natives packed,
With gaping, frightened Spaniards of the town.

Now, as Hernandez came upon the scene,
"Look, look!" the minions of Pedrarias yelled;
"There is Hernandez! seize the traitor! seize him!"
Then Espinosa, leader of the band,
Laid hold upon Hernandez, and he dragged
The good commander to the viceroy's chair.

"Thou art a traitor to the King, and now
Thy life is forfeit!" cried Pedrarias.
Hernandez, dazed and bewildered, scarce could
speak,

But gently faltered, "Who accuses me?
Have I not served the King through a long life
Of dangers and distress? Have I not laid
This province at his feet? Have I not brought
Great throngs of natives to our holy church?
Who dares accuse me? I am innocent!"
But now Pedrarias yelled, "Guards, seize that man!
Come, let the headsman end the traitor's days!"
They dragged the good man to the headsman's
block;

The hideous giant pulled him by the neck
Up to his side, and with a sudden stroke
Smote off the captive's head; he twisted then
His hairy fingers into the gory locks,
And held on high the severed head, its mouth
Still gasping, and its arteries spurting blood.
"Behold! This is the traitor's doom!" he roared
With a hoarse and husky voice. The multitude
Sickened with horror; men of stoutest heart
Turned from the sight, or covered up their eyes,
Groaning in mingled anguish and dismay.

That very time I rode upon the square.
I looked, and lo! by that gigantic arm
Upheld aloft, I saw Hernandez's head,
Dripping with blood; I saw the staring eyes
And the distended mouth. I saw the trunk,
Decapitated at the headsman's feet,
And drenched in gore. With agony my heart
Hung frozen. In one moment countless thoughts

Surged through my brain. I paused at first, aghast,
Numb with repulsion at the horrid sight;
Then, as I scanned my poor friend's mangled corse,
Mine eyes with pity melted: he, whose lips
Had never spoken aught but ruth and love,
Whose hand had never even wronged a mouse,
Or harmed a beetle, at this despot's word
Had died a felon's death! Then wild with rage,
I drew my sword, and spurred toward the place
Where sat Pedrarias, gloating over the scene.
The tyrant saw me coming, and he cried,
"Here is another traitor! Seize him, guards;
Dismount him, bind him, and then bring him here
Before me!" But I quickly drew my sword,
And standing in my stirrups, answered him,
"They dare not!" Still, his bandit minions came,
Seeking to drag me down. One laid his hand
Upon my bridle, but my sabre flashed,
Cleaving his head from temple unto chin.
The rest, affrighted, madly crowded back.
Still Espinosa sought to bar my way:
I rode upon him, and my horse's hoofs
Struck him to earth: I left him choked with dust,
Sputtering and cursing. When their leader fell,
Like foul hyenas all the henchmen fled,
Leaving a roadway to Pedrarias' chair.
Waving my sword, quickly I spurred my horse
Toward the tyrant. Then the headsman ran,
And so I faced Pedrarias all alone.
My sword I pointed at his face, and cried,
"Thou wretch, thou caitiff! I should end forever
Thy scroll of shame. But I will spare thy life
Because of one,—thou knowest whom. I leave
Thy service from this hour. But plot no more

Against me. For if thou shouldst seek again
My life, thine own is forfeit." White with fear,
He made no answer. So I rode away,
He and his crew molesting me no more.

BOOK VI

De Soto's Narrative Continued—Micer Codro, the Italian Astrologer—His friendship for De Soto—De Soto saves his life—The horoscope of Balboa and De Soto—Codro bears a letter from De Soto to Isabel, and returns with her answer—The Astrologer's prophecy—De Soto's death on the banks of a Great River foretold—The Great Nation of which De Soto was to be the forerunner, predicted—Its wonderful Arts and Inventions—Mediæval wizardry surpassed—Flight on winged steeds—Chaining the lightnings—The Channel cut from sea to sea—The new Nation's services to Humanity—The New Crusade—Nobler orders of Knighthood and Chivalry—Uplifting the poor—Martyrs to Science—Combat of the Knight with the three dragons—Parting of De Soto and Codro—The fate of Codro at the hands of Valenzuela, who, in turn, is called to account.

AMONG the many strange adventurers
Who came to see the new world, there was
one

Noteworthy for his learning over all.
His name was Micer Codro.¹⁷ He was born
In Venice, queen of cities of the world,—
Rearing her towers above the old gray sea,
That folds her fondly to his mighty breast,
And loves her as the bridegroom loves his bride.

The pebbles and the minerals and the gems,
The flowers and trees, the insects and the birds,
And all the beasts that roamed the wild, he knew.

He watched the sun and moon, and each eclipse,
Long years before it fell, his books foretold:
He studied the secrets of the mystic tides
Which rise and make obeisance to those orbs:
But best of all he loved to read the stars,
And learn their import in the fates of men.

A gaunt, ungainly man he was, and tall,
With clumsy feet that plodded awkwardly.
With downcast eyes, fixed ever on the earth,
Save when he studied sun, or moon or star,
Forever gesturing, talking to himself,
In dreams he roved, forgetful of the world.
To science wed, men's ways he never learned,
But innocent and credulous, he moved
As helpless as a little child. Though all
The mines of knowledge he possessed in fee,
He scarce could earn his daily bread; always
Distrustful of himself, he leaned for aid
On stronger shoulders than his own; poor soul!
Though he could cast another's horoscope,
All men could dupe him and all men deceive.

Balboa once had been his friend: when death
Deprived him of that patron, still he roved
With the Castilian troops in Darien.
All wondered at his learning, and in awe
Whispered of magic arts, whereby he read
The future as the past: yet all would smile
To see his homely figure, and his gait
Awkward and trudging, as he passed them by
With down-bent head, with far-abstracted air,
Muttering and murmuring ever to himself.
Yet they all loved him in their roughshod way;

No enemies he knew, and every man
For Codro would have fought had foe appeared.

When first I disembarked in Darien,
We met, and often afterward our fates
Threw us together: so our friendship grew.
Strangely he moved me, for he gave to me
At that first greeting, all his confidence,
With childhood's simple and implicit faith.
Yet never did the sage take note of me
In passing by, save when I shook his arm
To rouse him; but when roused, his loving eyes
Would beam with joy to rest upon my face.
A rambling little hovel was his home,
And here he showed me countless bits of stone,
Nuggets and crystals, grime-encrusted ores,
Assorted plants and leaves and roots and seeds,
With mummied beetles, pin-pricked butterflies,
Stuffed birds and snakes and frogs, and everything
Within this world that creeps or swims or flies,
Yet destined in that dusty sepulchre
Never to creep or swim or fly again.

He followed still our marches everywhere,
Collecting curious things along the way,
And, often wandering far beyond the lines,
Stood in great peril from the lurking foe.
One day we reckoned Codro with the lost;
This time he ventured further from the camp
Than ever before; we waited in suspense
From hour to hour, until the sun sank low,
Yet still he came not. With an anxious heart,
I mounted on my steed, and took the path
The sage had followed, calling out his name.

At last, near sunset, I espied him, gripped
By two strong savages, who dragged him on,
Writhing and balking and struggling to be free,
While two more savages, to make him haste,
Prodded him from the side. I could but smile,
Though mindful of his danger and distress,
To see his wide-rent hose, his dusty shoon,
And his loose, badly-fitting doublet, torn
Into a drooping rag. But in his hands,
Despite the mockery of the savages,
And in despite of all his desperate fears,
Grimly he clutched his precious specimens,—
A beetle and a lizard and a bird!

I fired my musket; so the Indians turned
And saw me coming; that astounding noise,
And the dread sight of horseman and of horse,
Drove all the barbarous captors off in terror.
My coming snatched him from a tragic fate:
So, having saved him, from that fateful hour
His love for me surpassed afar the love
Felt by the father for his only son,
His first-born, and the last of all his race.

I learned that Codro once in bygone years,
Had cast Balboa's horoscope.¹⁸ They said
He had then told the sea-discoverer
That at the age of two-and-forty years
A fateful act would come to pass, whereby
The drama of his wild, romantic life
Would reach a triumph or a tragedy;
That then his natal stars in war would strive
To yield him all the glory of the world,
Or sink him, reft of laurels, to the grave.

Balboa, ere this prophecy was made,
Had been the first of all the Christian world
To view the Sea of seas, and so he dreamed
That higher fortune waited still. But lo!
Within a little while Pedrarias
Entrapped, and then condemned him: thus he went
To face the headsman ere that year was done.

Now Codro begged to cast my horoscope;
I smiled and gave him leave. Within an hour,
Returning with a grave and anxious air,
Shuddering, he whispered, "Son, thy horoscope,
As once Balboa's did, shows that thy stars,
When thou shalt live to two-and-forty years,
Will bring thee greater honors, or lead on
Unto disaster and defeat,—perchance
To death." Great Chieftain, ere two years pass by,
That age I reach: I know not what shall then
Befall me. Yet but little stress I lay
On these old-woman stories; for I hold
That every man who is indeed a man,
Carries his own fate in his own strong hands,
That none can bring him honor save himself,
And no one can debase him save himself.

But Codro, seeing that I smiled to note
His strange forebodings, added, "Son, haste not
To spurn the message of the stars: nor think
That Nature moves haphazardly. For life,
And all this world, the sun, the moon and stars,
Move on with method and design. Behold
This vast creation; though all seems to thee
Confusion on confusion, ponder well,
And thou shalt find the whole harmonious,

Teaching thee secrets undisclosed before.
Hast thou beheld the swarming snow-flakes whirl
In the wild Norland tempest? They may seem
To careless eyes but formless powdery dust,
But scanned more keenly, every tiny flake
Becomes a lovely pure-white star. Look thou
On the thick leaves in some deep wilderness:
All seem to flutter in wild anarchy,
From law and order free; but peer again,
And thou shalt find them formed and ranked by
rule,

Heart-shaped, spear-shaped, alternate or opposed.
Behold the peacock's glittering train, outspread
In the bright morning sun! All seems at first
Dazzling disorder in those glorious plumes:
But look more closely: all those purple eyes
Are scattered through the green symmetrically,
Not carelessly, at random, for they curve,
Each lined with the other, arc on perfect arc,
Circle on perfect circle. So, my son,
The heavenly orbs move not by blinded chance,
But true to mystic laws, which, studied well,
Are found harmonious with all truths in life,
Revealing plans of God and fates of men."

Pedrarias in these days was racked with fears
At rumors of his downfall. So he penned
Long, earnest letters for the Spanish court,
One to the king himself, others to friends
Who basked in sunshine of the royal smile,
Entreating that his honors might be spared.
He looked about him for a messenger.
All men he feared and hated; and all men
Hated and feared him in return; whom, now,

Might he confide in? Codro came to mind.
The sage, he knew, was faithful; but again,
His awkward bearing and uncourtly speech,
• His childish ignorance of all worldly guile,
The far abstraction of his errant thoughts,
His day-dreams, and absorbing reveries,
Barred him from use in such a weighty mission.
Yet pondering over many schemes, at length
One pleased him. Sealing all his letters fast
In one great parcel, he directed that
Unto a trusted friend at court in Spain.
So now he sent for Codro, and he drawled,
"Old comrade, I would have thee sail for Spain,
Taking this parcel to a friend: thy task
Will end there; this alone I ask of thee,—
Safely to bear it to that friend. For he
Will understand his duty, and himself
Will take the burden of all further cares."
The old man, overjoyed to see again
The prospect of a journey home, at once
Gladly assented: soon was set the day
Whereon his vessel was to sail. So thus
Pedrarias found a messenger whose faith
He doubted not, yet whose unworldly ways
Would not debar him from the trust; for soon
The old man's task would end, and then the cause
Would rest in surer and in stronger hands.

Through all these loveless years not even one word,
Written or whispered, from mine Isabel
Had cheered me. Though I oft had written her,
Naught from my pen, I felt, had reached her, since
Each missive bound for Spain had first to pass
Under the viceroy's eye. Often I thought

She too had written, but Pedrarias
Had filched and burned her precious messages.

I knew not if the maiden still were true,
And I would ask myself, "Is she still mine?
Or, threatened and deceived, hath she been forced,
With sighs and sobs, to wed another?" Then,
As I reproached myself for doubting her,
It seemed her gentle spirit hovered near,
Like a sweet odor from some flower unseen,
And I would wonder (for I knew not), what
Had been the damsel's fate. So I oft cried,
"O Spirit, dost thou come from the warm realms
Of gladsome, glowing life, or dost thou flit
From dark and chilly dungeons of the tomb?
Come, tell me, tell me, Isabel, my sweet,
Hath the grave claimed thee? Or have cloister-cells
Immured thee as the bride of Christ? O love,
Haste not to join the seraph throngs on high,
Nor yet those saintly ones, who, living still,
Look only upward, on the world to come!
For though the liliated vales of Paradise
Whiter and sweeter for thee, love, would be,
Angels could better spare thee than ourselves,
Who would so miss thee from our darkened scenes:
Heaven may desire thee, but earth needs thee more!"

Now, when I learned of Codro's voyage home,
I sought him, and I begged him for his aid.
"O, I rejoice," he cried, "to prove myself
Still mindful of thy service in the past.
Give me the letter: it shall reach her hands,
And hers alone." I hastened to my tent,
And scrawled the missive with a trembling quill,

Declaring that my heart had never changed,
That never would I choose another bride,
And swearing by the powers of earth and heaven,
Some day to come and claim her for mine own.

"Dear, how I long to see you!" so I wrote.
"What dreary years have passed since that sad night
Whereon we parted! My dejected heart,
As cheerless as a dull December cloud,
Awaits you as that sombre cloud awaits
The sun whose beams alone its chilly gray
Can change to purple and to golden splendor.
Yet, sweetest, though a thousand leagues away,
I grope obscure, neglected, overlooked,
And uncompanied save by Poverty,
Be sure that fame and fortune shall be wooed
To bless us. So, be patient. Though my lot
Be lowly, bonnibel! despise it not.
For out of these surroundings, poor and mean,
Shall burgeon fairer things. Loathe not the worm
That gives the gorgeous butterfly its birth:
When thou delightest in the queenly rose,
Scorn not the sordid root from which it grew."
I sealed the letter with an ardent kiss,
And placed it in my dear old Codro's hands.

He sailed next morn, and a whole year went by
Ere his return. Through all these weary days
That lengthened with his absence, eagerly
And anxiously I waited; oftentimes,
Vexed with a wild impatience, I would rove
The sea-beach by the dark, unrestful sea,
Scanning the far horizon for his sail,
But still in vain. Time plodded slothfully,

As though the long moons were millenniums.
At last, however, far away at sea,
We spied his good ship, coming home.

When first

His vessel gained the port, I reached the deck
And threw mine arms around him. Joyously
And tenderly he greeted me in turn,
Placing my true love's letter in my hand.
With eager, trembling hands I broke the seal,
Devoured the lines with hurried, hungry eyes,
And panted in an ecstasy of joy:
My heart soared, larklike, unto heaven: thank God!
She still was living, she was still unwed,
And still she loved me over all the world!
"Mine own," she wrote, "thy letter bore to me
A bosomful of gladness. Yet it seemed
So long before it came! And longer still,
I fear, the time will be ere we shall meet
Once more. Ah me! The swallow comes with
spring,
With autumn flies, and with the spring returns:
The bud becomes a lily, withers, dies,
Moulds in its grave, becomes a bud again:
The orange bough hangs white with odorous blooms,
Sheds the sweet blossoms, bends with golden fruit,
And when the fruit falls, wreathes again in flowers:—
These come and go, and yet thou comest not!
I yearn to see thee as the exile yearns
To see his native land: I pine for thee
As the slave pines for liberty: I long
To greet thee as the shipwrecked sailor longs
To greet the far-off sail: and I desire
To clasp thee, love, as the dispurpled king

The crown he lost desires to wear again.
O love! Speed if thou canst, thy homeward steps,
As thou didst promise in the long ago!"

The dear old man then told me all his news:
Maria now had joined a sisterhood;
But Isabel herself had sworn to him
Never to take the veil, and never to wed
Till I should come from lands beyond the sea
To claim her as the maiden of my choice.
Quoth then the ancient with a sportive air,
Yet cunning, "Thou must not be jealous, boy,
But when I left, she kissed me, and avowed
That next to thee, she loved me best of all!"

Unhappily, my poor ambassador
Had not been wary. With suspicious eyes
A groom had watched him; then, his mission learned,
The lackey wrote Pedrarias, blabbing all.
The tyrant first concealed his rage in smiles,
Well knowing that I soon would take my way
To alien scenes in the far northern realms,
When Codro would be helpless in his hands.

Ah, well do I remember that last eve
We spent together! Little did he dream,—
The old astrologer who read the stars,
And learned the fate my future held concealed,—
That his own doom impended, and that never,
O never, should we meet again! We stood
Alone upon a cliff that overlooked
The southern seas; below, we heard the roll
Of never-resting billows, as they foamed
And fretted at the unresisting sands.

Westward, a lonely promontory loomed
With black and slender silhouetted palms
Against a brilliant blood-red after-glow.
Ah, brief, brief twilight of the tropics! soon,
Like human hopes, thy colors were to fade!

Above the sunset glow, in limpid skies
Of pale and tender green, one dewy star
Was palpitating all alone. Beneath
The solemn grandeur of those evening skies,
And seeming yet to mingle with it, rose
The tall, gaunt figure of the hoary seer.
Homely he seemed no longer, for his face,
Grave and prophetic, stilled my heart with awe:
His eyes burned through the darkness, and his tones
Seemed echoes of the far-off murmuring seas.
Our thoughts had long been serious; over us
Vast gloomy pinions seemed to hover. Dread
The future seemed. I felt some mighty Change
Was now at hand—a Change to other scenes,
To other lives, to other worlds. Enthralled,
With half-suspended heart, with quivering lips
Though speechless, and with pulses beating low,
I hearkened as the sage addressed me thus:

“In yonder quivering star, on yesternight
I glimpsed thy fate. Later, when slumber came,
In dreams thy future passed before mine eyes.
I saw thee stand beside a lordly river,
That flowed in epic grandeur to the sea,
The sovran of all streams of all the world.
Above thee, lofty forest-trees upreared
Their leafy coronals; gnarled, twisted boughs
Hung ghostly banners of funereal moss

In sombre tatters. On thy face I read
Defeat and disappointment: all thy hopes
Had perished. At thy side, a ragged horde,
Wild-eyed, despairing, plagued by savages,
Thy way-worn comrades stood. Oft would they snarl
And grumble at thee, and their mutiny
Was held in leash only by fear of thee,—
A fear well justified by the stern lines
Cut deeply in thy strong, determined brow
As with an acid. But that vision passed,
And then a cold dead face I saw afar,—
It was thine own, Hernando! Thou hadst died,
And the great stream would be thy sepulchre.
Within a casket cleaved from heart of oak
They laid thee, mailed in knightly armor: over
Thy stilly, pulseless breast they placed the Cross,
And in thy pallid hands thy goodly sword.
They took thee at the midnight, while the glare
Of torches flickering through the solemn gloom
Made the wild scene of burial wilder still,
And then, as the priests chanted, and thy friends
Raised lamentations unto God, they cast
Thee, in thine oaken casket, into the depths;
And there should be thy last long mortal home,
Till thou shouldst hear, far down within those deeps,
Announced by trumpets of the Last Great Day,
The Angel of the Resurrection's call.
But shudder not! In failing, thou hadst won;
In losing, thou hadst gained a victory
Well worth the struggles of a demigod.
That stream shall be the life-blood artery
Of a great nation, more august than Rome,
Than Troy or Carthage, Thebes or Nineveh.
Some day that nation shall declare with pride

That thou its temple's cornerstone didst lay;
That for its sake into a watery grave
Thou didst descend, a willing sacrifice
For sake of countless millions yet unborn.
Ah, never shall that land forget thy name!
Rejoice, my son, to earn its endless praise!

"What great achievements shall that people's be!
Merlin shall be outdone,—yea, at their deeds
Merlin, the demon's son, shall shrink abashed,
Confessing that his own black arts appear
Beside them but the triflings of a child.
The necromancers and enchanters famed
In monkish tome or lay of troubadour,
Shall find their sorceries despised: their sleights,
Their tricks, their petty wonders, that amazed
The gaping mediæval serf, now made
A theme for jest, shall dupe the serf no more.
The wizard, the warlock, and the sorcerer
Who in dark ages played on the fears of men,
Shall find their vaunted instruments of might
Laughed at as baubles; so, discredited,
The wonder-workers, followed by the jeers
Of all mankind, shall slink from sight away.

"They shall outstrip the estridge in his speed
Through Afric deserts, and outdistance far
The Alpine lammergeyer in his flight
Above the peaks of everlasting snow.
Yea! even the winged horse, the hippogriff,
Which cleaved the clouds, a steed for errant knights,
Those men shall bridle; goaded by their spurs,
That barb shall bear them safe through giddy skies,
Defying Samiel and Euroclydon.

In those days shall the traveler bid the groom
Bring forth his flying steed, as in these days
A lady for her gentle palfrey calls,
Caparisoned and pillioned for the hunt
Behind the baying hounds. Their chariots
Shall speed through subterranean galleries,
With beds of mighty rivers overhead.
The mountains shall they disembowel: so
The daylight, like a scintillating spear,
Shall keenly thrust its passage through: their cars
Shall rumble like tornadoes underground.
Yea! at this very spot, in years to come
Those men shall cleave a mighty strait, wherethrough
Their stately fleets may glide from sea to sea;
Beyond us, through these mountains, there shall come
Processions of gigantic ships, and lo,
Uncounted barks shall ride where now we stand!

“With lightnings they shall toy; their hands shall
draw

The vivid spark from stormy clouds, and then
Shall send it back, recalling and returning
To please their fancy. As the falconer
With jess and varvel makes the hawk his slave,
And holds it tethered, sends it forth, recalls,
So shall they sport with thunderbolts of Jove.
Gigantic Forces, shackled at their hest,
Shall then become their helots, and shall do
With multitudinous Briarean hands
Of iron, labors that the cyclops' forge
Achieved not, though the monstrous bellows blew
As brawny Vulcan sweated, tugged and toiled
To work it, and the white-hot focal flames
Were fed by countless myrmidonian hordes.

"Ferocious though these Forces be, and mailed
With might terrific, men shall drive them, tame,
Like sheep before the shepherd to the fold,
Or call them like a flock of homing doves
To shelter in the dove-cote. Yet again
They shall run errands like a bright-eyed page,
Fair-haired, fleet-footed, glad to serve his lord.

"Imprisoned sounds, beating at gilded bars,
Shall then be made to sing like singing birds
In golden cages hung on palace walls
For joy of queens and high-born ladies. Yea!
Wonder on wonder! with a human voice
Their songs shall rise, as from a troubadour
Imprisoned in a stony donjon-tower,
Arise divine, soul-melting carolings.

"At will of man,—North, South, East, West,—these
Powers
Shall come and go, swift, sure and punctual,
Yea, punctual as a lover at the tryst
Appointed with his loved one at the gloam,
When musky roses hang impearled with dews,
And kindly shades and friendly favoring stars
Hear sweet and secret vows they never tell.

"Orlando and Rinaldo shall behold
Their petty wonders set at naught. The scrolls
Of superstition that record the tales
Of Amadis and Tristram shall be thrust
Forgotten into dusty vaults of Time.
The deeds in flesh shall far surpass the deeds
In fiction of the twelve high paladins
Encircled round the throne of Charles the Great.

Lancelot with all his vaunted chivalry
Shall be disdained. The battlemented heights
Whereby he fought,—a poet's flitting dream,—
Shall linger but in legend. Yea, so high
Shall rise those Western towers, that Camelot,
The fabled Camelot of Arthur's Court,
Shall be a wonder of the world no more,—
A theme no longer in the speech of men,—
Forgotten save in half-forgotten tomes.

"The boasted age of chivalry shall pass
With all its feudal horrors. They who feigned
The airs of gentleness and courtesy,
No more shall sack the cities, nor again
Lay waste the vineyards, strip the fields of corn.
No more shall highways echo with the moans
Of butchered peasant, or deflowered maid,
By caitiff knighthood overcome. But now
Shall be true knighthood, chivalry indeed.
The yeoman shall no more with ox and swine
Be herded; as a brother he shall be
To prince and paladin; a man to men.
His child shall learn to read, to write, to think,
And claim joint heirship with the child of peers
Of all the newer, better world to come.

*"A new Crusade this people shall begin,
Not to regain an empty sepulchre,
But to set free the living Christ from thrall!*
A crusade shall be waged against disease,—
Disease of body and of heart and head,—
Against oppression by the favored few,
Against the superstitions of the mob,
Against the bigotry of narrow sects,

Against the darkness of benighted minds,
Against uncleanness,—filth of flesh or spirit,—
A crusade that shall free the souls of men !

“No longer shall Man seek to please vain gods
With blood of lowing heifers, bleating lambs,
On smoking altars; but his heart shall turn
Toward his fellow-mortals, and his gifts,
No longer wasted upon shadows, then
Shall gladden his brothers in the flesh. The old,
The poor, the lame, the deaf, the dumb, the blind,
Shall find a refuge fitted to their needs:
Asylums for the orphan shall be reared:
Hospitals shall stand open for the sick.
Libraries shall become the temples, where
Man’s intellect communion sweet shall hold
With saints of Science, Poetry and Art.
The poorest laborer in his humble cot
Shall comforts know and luxuries enjoy
Ungessed of old by kings in palaces.
When that age comes, the strong man shall exult
In lifting up the weak, as he now thrills
To feel the vanquished slave beneath his foot.

“The Holy Grail these knights shall seek, but not
The fabled cup of Mediæval dreams;
For they shall seek the goblet that, in truth,
Brims overflowing with the blood of Christ,—
The wine of Christian brotherhood and love!
No longer with the paynim shall they strive,
Save in a noble rivalry, wherein
Each seeks to prove his God the one true God
By deeds of goodness in His name performed.

"But though their noblest acts be those of peace,
And not of warfare, deem thou not their work
From peril free. With knightliness superb
They shall face terrors that the knights of old
Had viewed with startled eyes.¹⁹ They shall brave
Death

Cloaked in his weirdest, most mysterious gloom:
And they shall die unmurmuring, where no trump,
No fife, no drum, no flowers from ladies' hands,
No flash of armor, shouts of multitudes,
Nor neighing of the steeds, shall urge them on:
No! not one banner floating in the skies
Shall rouse their courage with its heavenly hues!
At throttles of their engines they shall perish,
Saving the lives of others in their care:
Beside his wheel the pilot's form shall rear,
Guiding the burning vessel steadily,
Unerringly to shore, where all debark
In safety but the faithful guide himself.
With noxious fluids, deadly elements,
Corroding acids, virus-breeding germs,
Their hands shall tamper, in their patient search
For panaceas for the ills of man.
Thus through their veins, with rabid virulence
The venom shall be spread; within their bones
Shall gnaw the sharp concentrated essences,
While unrelenting poisons, slow and sure
As Fate itself, shall burrow in their flesh,
And deadly maladies with viper fangs
Shall pierce their bosoms, as was pierced of old
The bosom of the Empress by the Nile.
The dreaded Pestilence, that barbarous men
Ascribed in fables to the wrath of God,
And not to human foulness, as was just,—

This they shall fight, and fighting to the death,
 Shall immolate themselves. To find the spring,
 The deadly poisoned spring of human ills,
 They shall breathe fetid air, tread purlieus foul,
 Wade through uncleanness. They shall give them-
 selves

To stings of noxious insects, dying thus,
 To learn the secret sources of the Plague,
 And save their fellows; act how trivial,
 How slight and unromantic in our eyes,
 Compared to deeds of valor on the field!
 And yet unmatched in all knight-errantry,—
 Combat more grand than ever crusader fought
 With Saracen on plains of Palestine
 To win the holy city from Mahound.”

The tropic twilight's fleeting glow had ended,
 But in the darkness, Codro's awkward form
 Now loomed transfigured, and his homely face
 Raised glorified: his eyes, like coals of fire,
 Seemed burning through my breast: his garb uncouth
 Seemed like the shaggy skin of a wild beast, thrown
 Over the shoulders of a hoary seer:
 He himself seemed some holy eremite,
 A dweller in the caves on mountain-heights,
 Downcome to cities of the plains to tell
 Dark prophecies learned face to face with God.
 Was this the same poor soul whom once I knew
 As Codro? this resplendent form,—was this
 That old unlovely, rugged husk of yore?
 Amazed I looked upon him,—half in fear:
 But soon mine arm he grasped, speaking again
 With animation even greater still:
 “Lo! I behold the noblest knight that ever

Hath trod the soil terrene. He comes, he comes,
The Occidental Saladin, the Bayard
Of realms Hesperian! Tilt nor tournament,
Pageant nor combat of the feudal age,
His peer beheld! But accoladed not
By hand of king or queen, Nature herself
Declares him knight of knights. He goeth forth
To battle, yea, to battle. For I see
Three frightful dragons bar his path; their wings
Are wings of vultures, and their massive paws
Are paws of lions; on their breasts are scales
Like steely armor; trunks of crocodiles
Meander backwards, till the monstrous coils
Seem twining serpents; from their fearful jaws
Leap fire and smoke and deadly fumes. Seven heads,
Heads of gorillas, hath each beast, whereof
The central wears a crown of gold, while six
Rear glittering golden mitres. Now begins
The dreadful conflict. On the champion
Dash the horrific nightmare shapes of hell.
God grant thine arms, redoubted knight, shall be
Victorious! See, with hardihood he meets
The first fell dragon: long he strives: at last
His falchion through the scaly armour smites,
Wounding the monster with a doughty thrust.
The second beast, in vengeance, furiously
Rushes upon him with a maddened roar;
Flames vomit from her throats; her rabid lips
Drip venom; from each forkèd viper-tongue
Spews foaming virus; hot and fetid blasts
Hiss from her nostrils. But behold! I see
A good thrust from the falchion lay her low,—
A vast, unwieldy creature, vaster far
Than the leviathan of ocean deeps.

But now the third he faces, and the last.
 Fearful that duel! Never in the years
 When demigods and Titans strove with gods,
 Was seen such battling. Now, alas! it seems
 The dragon rises victor; now the knight
 Beneath the monster's lion paw is smitten;
 Now are his golden tresses singed and seared
 In raging flames from out of the brutish jaws;
 Blow after blow falls from those vulture wings,
 Crushing his helmet. Though he struggles on,
 His glittering armor dims, besmirched and soiled
 With the rank poison and the loathsome fumes
 From beastly mouths and nostrils. Yet behold!
 The knight, he wins, he wins! For now at last
 His brand falls with a great heroic sweep,
 Splashing the vast gorgonian shape with blood.

"But stay! I see that all those loathsome beasts
 Are living still, though vanquished; for they groan
 And bellow to each other in their pain,
 True to a horrid fellowship. The first
 Dread shape is Despotism; beyond it writhes
 The dragon Bigotry; the third and last,
 Most hideous, longest-lived of all the herd,
 Doubly the parent of the other twain,—
 Both dam and sire of all things dark and dread,—
 Is Superstition, foe to light, to joy,
 To God, to Nature, most of all, to Man.

"They flap their monster vans; arising now,
 A frightful cloudy whirlwind, blackening heaven,
 And shedding gore in torrents, they speed forth
 And vanish. May their darksome pinions never

Be overlooming earthly skies again!
Yet though defeated, still they live to hound
The souls of those who, lapped in idleness,
Their vigilance renounce; for on that day
Man toys away his vigor, and becomes
A trifler and a sluggard, shall return
Those dragons as of yore, his seed to plague."

Shaken by passion, now the graybeard sage
Sinks back, with hands convulsive, with his lips
A-quiver, and his gaunt frame shuddering.
But by and by, his knitted brows grow smooth,
His eyes grow calmer, and ere long he seems
A semblance of his old-time self. Again,
In tones more placid, he continues thus:
"Heaven bids me warn thee. O, beloved son,
Thou art misled! The Spaniard's thirst for gold,
Wherein thou sharest, shall not profit Spain,
Nor thee thyself. Not silver, gold nor gems,
Shall be thy true reward. For thou shalt find
That the fell methods of the conqueror,
Who smites the pagan, plunders treasure-isles,
And rears his mansions by the toil of slaves,—
These methods that assoil thy Country's fame,—
Upbuild no nation, make no people strong.
In dying thou shalt seem to fail, and yet
In dying thou shalt prove to man this truth:
A noble failure shames a bad success.
Long shalt thou stray in life that truth to find.
Hear me, Hernando! Thou art now as one
Who flounders on through fens, perplexed, confused,
Following false lights, will o'the wisps, that flit
Through poison-reeking air. Believe not, Son,
As thou art lured and beckoned on and on

From quag to quag, from gloom to deeper gloom,
Each marsh's flame a Star of Bethlehem!"

He ceased. And now the tension of his face
Relaxed: his frame no longer shook. His eyes
Dimmed from their glitter, and his voice died out
Like the deep sound of winds that pass, and fade
To faintest murmurs through the solemn pines
On hilltops far away. His rugged face
Again was homely; his unlovely form
Again was awkward, stripped of every grace.
Once more his step was shuffling, and his feet
Clumsy; his air and portance more than ever
Ungainly. Then I wondered what it meant,
This strange, weird prophecy, this wild advice.
Long have I pondered since upon it, yet
In vain. The secret of that prophecy
Is hidden from me still,—perchance forever.
Sometimes I seem to grasp it, but again
It slips the leash, eludes me, and is gone.

Homeward we plodded through the dark. But now
His ardor had vanished; both of us
Were pensive. Over us there seemed to hover
A premonition of some deep, dark sorrow
That soon would cover all our skies. But O,
We divined not that at the morning light,
When parting we should part to meet no more!
We reached our tents: there in the flickering light
Of dying camp-fires, girt with solemn glooms,
I knelt before him; then he laid his hand
Upon me in a silent blessing; then
He raised my face; he held it in his palms,
And kissed me as a father kisses his son.

Next day my journey to the north began:
Another year had passed ere I returned,
And then returning (as I soon shall tell),
I heard the story of the old man's fate.

After I sailed, Pedrarias sought him out,
Saying, "A long sea-voyage hath been planned
Among the isles along Parita's Gulf,
To search for mines of silver and of gold,
Which, as we learn, abound there, rich with ore.
We need the guidance of a man like thee,
Whose knowledge of the hidden wealth of earth
Fits him to aid us. Wilt thou go?" So then,
Eager as ever to explore the world
For Nature's guarded secrets, Codro went,
And going, doomed himself to such a fate
As demons might have spared their prey in hell.
A heartless creature, Valenzuela named,
The captain of a ship about to sail,
Received the old man at the despot's hands
With a command to bear him to some isle
In seas remote, and leave him there, marooned.
Pedrarias bade the captain spare his life,—
A mandate left unheeded.

For as soon

As the land faded in the eastern haze,
Valenzuela threw him into chains,
And bound him to the foremast. Ten long days
He was kept there bareheaded. Hour by hour
His face burned in the fearful tropic heat:
The tropic sky, hung like a dome of brass,
Scorched his poor withered body; round the keel,
The tropic sea, like slimy oil on fire,

Blinded him with its everlasting glare.
Day after day, aflame with pitiless wrath,
The dazzling tropic sun arose at dawn,
And through the long, long noon, white-hot it blazed,
Then, like a blood-red wound upon the sky,
Flooded the sea with crimson ere it set.
The night would fall and bring him no relief,
But chill his body with unwholesome dew.
Next day the tropic sun would blaze again,
The molten skies would flame, the sea would glare.
The deck was blistered in the torrid heat;
The boards warped, and the hull oozed tar and gum.
Sometimes a dolphin leaped above the waves,
Or schools of flying-fish skimmed by; but often
The lean, lank hideous sharks, with gaping mouths
And ravenous upturned bellies, greedily snapped
Their fearful jaws and flashed their saw-like teeth.
Beyond this was no life upon the sea,
That, weak as a sick man spent with feverish dreams,
Dozed on in drowsy, weary idleness,
Languid and listless, craving for a breeze.

The brutal sailors jested, laughed and jeered
To see the graybeard hanging there. At times,
When he had begged for water, they would bring
Vessels of brine dipped from the sea below,
And splash him till he writhed and gasped for breath,
Half drowned. Their tortures he endured, but never
Did Micer Codro curse, or wish them harm.
They gave him sparingly such food and drink
As kept him living on from day to day,
And made him die a thousand deaths in one.
The end drew nigh: but ere he passed away,
Taking him down, they stretched him on the deck.

The pilot, who alone had pitied him,
Nor ever harmed him, now approached his side.
"Pilot," he said, pointing toward the shore,
"Wilt thou convey me to yon little isle
Far in the distance? I am dying, yet
I long to rest my head on earth once more
Ere I am taken." Said the pilot then,
"That is the mainland, not an island, there."
"Nay, nay," said Codro, "thou wilt surely find
Two islands yonder; and amidst one spreads
A little harbor. On those islets there
Are mossy, vine-hung rocks, and verdant trees,
With cool and gushing fountains in the shade.
My brow is feverish, and I fain would be
By murmuring waters, on the soft green earth,
With emerald shadows on my blinded eyes,
While cool and odorous breezes fan me. There
Convey me, and there let me die in peace."

The pilot turned his vessel toward the shore.
At length he saw the old astrologer
Had spoken truly, for the points of land
Were islands green with tufts of clustering trees,²⁰
And fertile with their many running springs.
They anchored by one islet; there they took
Poor Micer Codro in their arms ashore.
But ere he left the ship, the captain came
To be assured that his victim lay in death;
And then the old man in a solemn voice,
Said to him, "Captain, I am soon to die,
Murdered by thee: so hear and heed me well:
For now I tell thee, ere one year shall end,
Thou too shalt die; I, going, summon thee
To meet me at the judgment-seat of God."

The villainous captain paled; but soon he feigned
Indifference; then he smiled a sickly smile,
Hiding his fears with simulated mirth.

They laid the sufferer in delightful shade
Under a tree with boughs of living green,
Upon a mossy bank beside a rock,
Where a cool fountain bubbled through its ferns.
Here, lulled by babbling waves and fluttering leaves,
His fevered brow caressed by gentle gales,
The blameless man sighed peacefully, and died.
A grave they digged upon the selfsame spot,
And buried him. A cross carved on a tree
Still marks that far-off final resting-place;²¹
And there, in calm and quiet, all alone,
He waits the trumpet of the Judgment-day.

Dear Micer Codro! Christ Himself hath said
As little children we must all become,
Or else we can not enter into heaven;
And thou, O, Micer Codro, wast a child,
A little child, throughout thy whole long life.
Thy head was gray: books lent thee all their lore,
And science kept no secret from thine eyes:
Yet thou wast artless in thine ignorance
Of worldly wisdom with its craft and guile,
And free and pure from cunning, as the babes
Whom Jesus blessed while sitting on His knee.
Dear Micer Codro! In that paradise
Where thou art treading now, are wondrous things,
Transcending all the marvels of the earth
That lured thee in this transitory life
To be a pilgrim over sea and land.
In that high realm are nobler, greener trees,

More gorgeous flowers, more delicious fruits,
Birds more magnificent, more glorious gems,
Skies bluer than we see, and splendid stars
That far outshine the brilliance of our own.
And thou shalt search and find and study all,
With more delight and even greater love
Than sights terrestrial ever drew from thee.

Among the angels in that happy realm,
Robed in white moonlight, crowned with dewy stars,
With peacock pinions or with swan-like wings,
I long to meet thee, not like them arrayed,
But simple, yea, and homely as thou wert
While walking in these hapless haunts of men,—
For so I knew thee, and should love thee best!

After a year had passed, from northern shores,
Accompanied by some comrades, I returned
To Darien on a little caravel.
The captain was a drunken, loud-mouthed brute,
Who loved to lounge and boast of villanies
Wherein the hero-part himself had played.
One night I heard him tattling in high glee
(What little things amuse a drunken man!)
Of trivial matters to his friends. But soon
Grown loud and boisterous from his cups, he blabbed
The story of the murder of my friend.
No names at first he gave, but he declared
That the old man had only sinned in bearing
The letter of some youngster to a girl,
And fetching back her answer. Here I started,
And drew still closer to the captain's seat.
He told us then of all the agonies
The poor old wretch had suffered ere he died,

And as he gabbled on he laughed aloud,
Rubbing his hands, and winking here and there.
Now in his maudlin state he racked his mind
To recollect his victim's name. "O yes!"
Clapping his hands, he cried,— "I have it now,—
Codro—his name was Codro. And the girl,—
Zounds! let me think. What was *her* name? Aha!
I'll call it,—I remember,—Isabel,—
Yes, yes, the daughter of Pedrarias!"
I caught my breath, laid hand upon my sword,
And yet restrained my anguish and my wrath.
Soon he related how the dying man
Had summoned him before the bar of God,
But then with hoarse guffaws, he rambled on:
"Yet that was false, because he prophesied
That I should die before the year was over;
This is the last day: when the clock strikes twelve,
The year is ended; yet you see me here.
It only lacks an hour to midnight; so
The driveling prophet proves himself a liar."
I burned with rage; and yet with misery
I sate inactive. So I left him free
To babble on until the vessel's clock
Lacked but ten minutes of the stroke of twelve.
Then as he raised his glass, and chuckling, cried,
"Here's to the soul of Codro! may he rest,
Deep-buried with his lying prophecy!"
"Hold, not so fast!" I cried: "thou drunken fiend,
There is still time to die! I say to thee,
The man that thou hast murdered was my friend.
Besotted caitiff, since he prophesied,
I now will make the prophecy come true!"
Then as my sword fell with a lightning flash,
His head, dissevered, rolled upon the floor.

Part II

BOOK VII

The end of the first night's Narrative—The second night's gathering—De Soto's Narrative continued—Pedrarias is deposed—The Conquest of Peru—Pizarro, his brothers, and Almagro—The Peruvians and their country—The Andes—Volcanoes and snow-peaks—Canals through the deserts—The mountain highways—Llamas and vicuñas—Hunting the vicuñas—Life among the peasantry and the nobility—Their agriculture, and mode of apportioning lands—Their marriage customs—Treatment of the aged—Their religion—Lake Titicaca—Descent of the Gods—The founding of Cuzco—The Incas and their families—Civilization of the Peruvians—Their attainments in the arts—Their temples—Vessels and ornaments of gold and silver.

NOW, reverend sire, the night grows late. Shouldst
care

To learn more of my story, at evenfall
Upon the morrow, thou shalt hear. But long
Is the lone pathway to thy wigwam door;
Out in yon wilds the snows are falling still;
The keen winds yet are moaning; famished wolves,
Where trails thy path through solitary woods,
Go howling: tempt thou not this fearful night!
Thee and thy little daughter we can yield
A tent to rest in cosily until morn:
Remain with us, I pray thee.

With these words
De Soto ceased. Alonzo quickly glanced

At Lulla: bashfully, yet eagerly,
He blurted in his boyish fashion, "I
Will let them have my tent, for I can sleep
As snug and warm here in mine uncle's tent,
Under this bearskin robe beside the fire."
Thus he; and then he blushed and hung his head,
Startled at his own boldness: Lulla turned
Upon him with a wistful look, though shy.
"I thank thee for thy kindness," then replied
The Chieftain to De Soto, "and to thee,
My fair young son, our hearts are grateful. Since
The snowstorm is so bitter, we will stay.
At evenfall to-morrow I will beg
To hear more of my lord's adventurous life."

They parted for the night. On the next eve
The snow had ceased to fall; but still the blasts
Of winter whined and whistled round the tent,
And whipped and flapped the canvas, till it seemed
A band of witches on the winds careered,
Lashing relentlessly their phantom steeds
And shrieking, while their long disheveled hair
And their pale spectral mantles streamed behind,
Flaunting and fluttering in the icy blast.
Around the same great ruddy fire again,
Expectant of De Soto's story, sat
The selfsame party of the night before.
So then his chronicle the knight resumed:

Time speeded on: the new-made governor,
Vain of his new-won honors, disembarked.
Pedrarias he denuded of his powers,
Casting him out, a friendless wanderer,
Embittered and heart-broken. Thus adrift,

An old wreck on the Dead Sea of his dreams,
We lose him, and in mercy we forbear
Our condemnation: God will be his Judge.

Illustrious Chieftain, I shall now relate
The story of the Conquest of Peru,
A bold emprise, but one so steeped in blood
That never may I hope to call to mind
Its annals but in dark remorse. Throughout
That pitiless conflict I was yoked with men
Cruel and avaricious, in whose hearts
Justice and Mercy, scourged and crucified,
Had perished at their ruined shrines. Alas!
For years I now had toiled without reward,
For years my fond ambitions all had failed.
Dear dreams had fluttered from my fading youth
Like shattered petals from a dying rose:
Green glories of the spring had fled my heart,
And left but parched and dusty summer drought.
I saw Life passing, passing, hour by hour,
Leaving me, disappointed, far behind
In the mad race for fortune, power and fame;
My best days were no more; yet still I roved
The sport of niggard fate. Grown desperate,
An easy prey I fell to those who came
Proffering high hopes of riches and renown
For aid in perpetrating hideous wrongs.

The leader of this daring enterprise,
Francisco Pizarro, in other years
Had been a leader in our cavalry,
Thridding the tropic jungles by my side
When old Uracca first combated us.
Base-born, his sire a cavalier, his dam

A common trollop, by those paramours
He was abandoned: for, tradition says,
Cast out to perish in a weed-grown waste,
Sickly, half-starved, and naked save for rags,
A peasant found him, suckling from a sow.²²
Reared as a swineherd, with the swine he roved,
Unkempt, untended. So the urchin grew,
Untaught to read a line or write a word,
To schools a stranger and to books a foe.

But risen to manhood, straight and tall and strong,
With martial grace he moved. Dark was his face,
With sallow firm-set cheeks, from whence his beard
Downflowed in dusky waves. His jetty locks
Shadowed a lofty brow, under whose dome
His brilliant black eyes flashed with fiery dreams
Of conquest over empires drenched in blood.

Thereafter, craft and valor in his soul
Ever contended for the mastery.
No captain ever bolder in his plans,
None more far-seeing, quicker none to strike,
Yet he used fraud and guile where simple truth
Better had served him by an hundredfold.
Albeit the lettered world he never knew,
Clearer his mind was than the morning star.
In that calm brain was never strife or storm,
On that calm brow reigned no uncertainty,
In that calm bosom all was strong and sure.
His purpose once conceived, he never flagged;
Once on his path, he never looked behind.
His plans he laid; then with a bloodhound scent,
And never swerving, never turning back,
He followed till he found and seized his prey.

O, no, he could not read! But well indeed
The world of living men he knew: the Past
Allured him not: the Present was his own.
To ruined shrines, to lichen'd tombs, his feet
Never made pilgrimage: things Now and Here,
Still breathing force and vigor, claimed his thoughts.
Red-blooded, vital was he, to the core.
Small was his need, wise in the ways of life,
For dusty wisdom dug from dusty books!

One asks, what purpose moved the Power Divine
In raising such a man to scourge the world
With death and desolation? Ask as well
Why hath He formed the tiger, in whose jaws
Is crushed the bleating lamb; or called to life
The fearful cobra with its hooded crest
Dilate in deadly fury. Who can say?

Lo! as the Samiel of Arabian sands
Sweeps with its scorching whirlwind through the skies,
And overwhelms the startled caravan,
Merchant and camel, Bedouin and steed,
And gloats above the spoil,—ingots and coins
Of silver and of gold, the ivories
Of Afric, glorious gems of Ind, the silks
Of Persia, chill Siberia's priceless furs,
The shawls of Cashmere, spices from the groves
Of Borneo, sweet Sabeian frankincense,—
All buried in the flaming sands, and soon
Left useless and forgotten far behind,—
And as that blast whirls ever madly on,
To overtake some richer caravan,—
So swept Pizarro. Untold treasures, red
With the heart's blood of murdered multitudes,

He heaped and hoarded, but his avarice,
Insatiate as the avarice of that storm,
Still drove him onward,—ravenous,—unappeased,—
To win more treasures, redder still with blood.

That which the nations of the Earth have known,
The nations of the Earth shall know again:
All truth is repetition. As once fell
The fierce barbaric Northern King on Rome,
And sacked her splendid glories, so this man,
The stern executor of the wrath of heaven,
Came scattering woes and wailings in his path:
God raised them both: His purpose who can tell?

Pizarro once had been Balboa's friend,
And in romantic and illustrious years
Beside him had he watched with kindling eyes
The great Pacific billows sweep and surge.
Wild peoples told them of a noble realm
Of gold and silver laved by southern seas,—
An empire called Peru. Pizarro dreamed
Of conquest and dominion in that land,
And pawned his soul to make his dream come true.
But first he sought the aid of others: soon,
As his first comrade in the daring scheme,
Almagro joined him with a little force.
He, like Pizarro, base-born, reared in want,
And driven, despised, to fight his way alone,
Had never learned to spell or scribble. Yet,
A doughty soldier, stout of hand and limb,
Skilled with the steed, and master of the sword,
An ally of surpassing worth he proved.
Ill-favored was his countenance; one cheek
Was slashed with ugly scars; one eye was gone.

A disappointed cynic, sharp of tongue,
Of friend and foe he talked unceasingly,
Rating the whole wide world from end to end,
Nor speaking one good word of one living man.
But he was generous to the farthing's end,
Though his friends borrowed, never to return;
His purse gave suck to every hungry leech;
Freely he squandered, but his cynic smile
Proclaimed contempt for all his parasites.

Once, with a band of rude adventurers
These two had ventured south afar. But there
Misfortune dogged them: though they spoiled the
fields,

Pillaged the towns and slew the habitants,
But little gold they found; their ragged horde
Encountered shipwreck, famine and disease,
And dwindled as the shafts of ambushed foes
Whistled around them in the tangled wilds.
Repulsed, yet not discouraged, they dispatched
Pizarro back to Spain. To court he went:
There his rough eloquence and martial air
Pleased the soft courtiers, charmed the silken dames,
And moved the king to grant amazing powers
Of conquest and dominion in the south.

Four brothers he induced to lend their aid;
Returning then, another force he raised.
A curious clan, those brothers! For, while one
Was lettered, and in wedlock born, the rest
Were base-born and untutored like their chief.
The first, Hernando, sneered at all the rest,
Who, bearing the brand of bastard through the world,
Wrote not their names, nor pored above a page.

A high-born dame his mother was, who wedded
Francisco's father in his youthful days,
But ere her first-born learned to prattle, died.
Hernando, selfish, rude and quarrelsome,
Often in boisterous insolence would storm
Against his brothers: but Francisco's voice,
Cool, measured and determined, never failed
To quell his loud rebellions. Of his house
The eldest, yet he lived to see the others
Pass to the next world, leaving him alone.

Two other brothers, one Gonzalo named,
And one called Juan, came through the father's side,
But through another mother; while the fourth,
With the same name, Francisco, had been borne
By the same mother to a sire unknown.
Like a young, handsome prince, whom lawless hands
Have stolen from his cradle, and upreared
In squalor at some peasant's lowly hut,
So that his bearing ever after shows
The traces of that mean life in the past,—
Gonzalo with his proud and courtly air
Revealed a strain of coarseness. Valorous
To recklessness, impatient of advice,
Quick-tongued and vain, at times he disobeyed
Urgent commands, and all our host involved
In strange confusion. In his ruthless course,
His hand as quickly would have set the torch
Unto a peopled city, as his foot
Would have kicked down an ant-hill.

Juan, the next,
Pale-faced, mild-eyed and placid, seemed unfit
For warfare: yet in fight he never quailed.

Simplicity is greatness: and so he,
Simple and artless as a little child,
Great deeds performed, but never pompously.
The green oasis greener still appears
Isled in a desert red and fountainless;
So he more noble seemed for being found
In the delightless waste of cruelty
And lust and avarice that environed all
Who bore Pizarro's world-detested name.

Francisco, youngest brother of the five,
Was also weakest: slow to think or act,
Uncouth and awkward, doubtful of himself,
Hernando domineered him brutally.

The kingdom of Peru then trailed along
The great Pacific waters to the South
Above eight hundred leagues;²³ its common width
Was barely ninety. This extended zone
The lordly Andes guarded on the east.

A sandy, stony desert, glares the coast,
Hot, pestilent, and rarely blest with rain.
As one roves inland, every step he takes
Tends upward from the level of the tides.
He reaches next the highlands, where the earth
Is green with foliage, fanned by wholesome airs,
And freely watered by refreshing streams.
Soon rocky heights are reached; and climbing there
Among the giants of the mountain-world,
On every hand colossal peaks he views,
Beyond all puny words of man sublime,
Piercing the wandering clouds five miles in air,
With glittering summits of eternal white.

Their glorious monarch, Chimborazo, looms
With crystal diadem of snow and ice
Translucent in perpetual purity
Against the azure of Peruvian skies,
A heavenly beacon for all mariners
Who steer their vessels far away at sea.
Here great volcanoes lift from mighty cones
Their everlasting torches unto God;
Here granite cliffs and crags, a league in height,
Appear gigantic frowning battlements.
Sierras, stern and savage, rear aloft
Their horrent thunder-cloven pinnacles;
Steep and stupendous, peak and precipice
Usurp the empurpled princedom of the skies.
But oft beside the bleak volcano's waste,
Where blasted rocks in ramparts threaten heaven,
One may descry some gently-curving knoll,
Its glad green dingles fringed with plummy palms—
Close-nestled to the monster's sooty breast
Like Venus, Queen of Beauty and of Love,
With swart and grizzled Vulcan for her spouse.
Here dash appalling torrents, crushed to foam:
With rainbows crowned, robed in aerial mist,
The glorious cascades thunder loudly down.
Here yawn great gorges by the narrow way,
Black, bottomless and horrid, where one slip
Would hurl the traveler to eternity.

In this high altitude a little grass
Peeps through the rocks and never-melting snows,
And here vast flocks of llamas rove and browse.
Half-camel and half-sheep, the llama yields
Its wool for raiment and its flesh for food,
While on its back are countless burdens borne.

Spongy its hoofs are, with a pointed claw,
So that it climbs steep rocks and slippery ice,
Sure-footed as a lizard on a wall.
Like to the camel of the Barcan waste,
The little beast can plod for irksome days
Without one sip of water. These great throngs
Of llamas all obey a shepherd's voice,
Each shepherd numbering legions in his flock.
Through scanty, rocky pastures strewn with snow,
They crop the stunted herbage, moss or grass,
Moving in mute obedience to his will.
Their kindred creatures, the vicuñas, yield
A flesh more savory, and a silkier wool,
But never serve as beasts of burden.²⁴ They
Rove higher summits still, in countless herds,
Companions of the transitory clouds.

Here also dwells the condor, lord of birds,
With fearful talons and prodigious wings,
Who soars above the tops of loftiest peaks,
And seeks a home on high in dizzy crags—
Steed of the storm-clouds, lion of the skies,
The undisputed emperor of the air.
Here in dread kingdoms of the sleet and snow,
The hailstone, lightning, and the thunderbolt,
He floats serene, though elements may war,
A hermit who despises all the world
Of creatures crawling in the dust with man.

The seasons known of all terrestrial climes
Enriched this land with grains and fruits and flowers
Of tropic, temperate and of arctic zones.
The cherimoyer ripened near the coast,
Most luscious of all fruits of all the world.

In breezy highlands, emerald fields of maize
Supplied the nation with a wealth of bread.
These ancient people, with enlightened skill
Had doubled Nature's bounty: long canals
Through deserts by the seashore, had they digged
To guide the streams from ever-melting snows
On mountain summits, and exhaustless pools
To hoard the water into months of drought.
So in that sandy, barren waste arose
Luxuriant orchards, laden low with fruits,
Green forests ringing with melodious birds,
And gardens gorgeous with resplendent flowers.

Great nets of highways thridded through the land,
The wonder of all wonders of the world.
Like green silk ribbons through the desert's red,
They stretched with verdant trees on either hand,
So that the traveler fared at burning noon
In shadows cool from overreaching boughs.
But the great mountain roads, that interveined
The heights most lofty and most rugged, seemed
The handiwork of giants or of gods.
They spanned the mountain torrents, pierced the
crag,
Cut galleries through the solid granite walls,
Ran by terrific chasms, climbed steep cliffs,
Clung chain-like round the sides of giddy peaks,
And convoluted like a serpent's train
Through the white wastes of chill perpetual snows.
At times, great stairways, hewn from flinty rock,
In spirals ever circling high and higher,
Would make the worn wayfarer pause and pant
Like a long-hunted hare, when safe at last,
She sinks exhausted from the hot pursuit.

And oft, suspension bridges, thread-like, hung
Over dreadful gulfs of darkness: high in air,
Their osier cables, tough and thick and stout,
Seemed frailer than the spider's airy webs,
And shook and swayed and swung this way or that,
Till the head swam, the feet staggered, and all
The senses whirled, so that the earth and sky
Seemed reeling with the traveler in a swoon.
Sometimes ravines of depth stupendous, filled
Unto the top with solid masonry,
Yielded firm pathways, smooth as marble floors.
Great were these roads in length; and one indeed,
Meandering through the land two thousand miles,
Wedded the desert to the fruitful plain,
Chained mountains to the seas, and made as one
The realms of Winter's everlasting storms
And the warm Edens of eternal Spring.

No steeds had those Peruvians; so the paths
Were rarely more than seven short paces wide.
Over them trudged, with costly burdens heaped,
The little ñllamas. Scarce three cubits high,
These pigmy beasts of burden well could bear
An hundredweight of goods; but more than this
None would endure; for neither cuffs nor kicks,
Nor coaxing would induce the brutes to stir
When overladen: sinking to their knees,
There they remained, and never would they rise,
Nor budge one step while taxed beyond their strength.
Through snowy field of rocky Andes heights
The wild vicuñas roved unshepherded.
No peasant dared to slay them; but reserved
For hunting by the monarch of the realm,

Once in each year a mighty chase was held,
Such as no empire of the ancient times
Or modern, ever saw, or sees again.
Yet, careful not to lessen these great herds,
They changed the scene of hunting year by year,
A lustrum passing ere a chase recurred
In the same region. At the chosen time,
The peasants came at call, for miles around,
A band not rarely five-score thousand strong,
And then commanded by the Inca, formed
A ring gigantic, whose circumference
Might have enclosed a province. Steadily,
With clubs and spears the men would then advance
Toward the centre, and so hour by hour
The circle would contract. The scared wild beasts—
Vicuñas, and their neighbors of the heights,—
Would flee the army as it drew more close
Lifting great shouts, and waving clubs and spears.
Soon would the lines grow thicker, and at length
The men in arcs opposed would sight each other,
While in the middle swayed a frenzied throng
Of deer, vicuñas, and wild beasts of prey—
Gigantic clumsy bears, and ragged wolves,
With growling panthers, jaguars hoarse with rage,
Fierce lynxes, foxes quivering in affright,
Pugnacious wild boars, foaming rabidly,
And every living brute that roams the peaks.
Frantic with terror, plunging here and there,
Snapping and snarling, bleating, or lifting howls,
They stamped and crushed each other under foot,
They wildly roared, they gnashed with tooth and tusk,
They pitched and plunged on battling paws and claws,
They reared and fought, stampeded, dashed each way,—
All madly seeking pathways of escape.

But everywhere the wall of men opposed,
Driving them back in struggling anarchy.
All beasts of prey, and all the deer, were slain;
A few vicuñas likewise suffered death
As food for huntsmen, though the vaster herds
Escaped with robbery of their wool. When sheared
Of this, their silken vesture, and released,
Again they climbed the peaks, to rove at will.
Great flocks were captured so: once, men declare,
A throng of two-score thousand thus were shorn.

Above all other labors was esteemed
The tillage of the soil: so every year,
The Inca, in the presence of his court,
And hailed by throngs of peasants and of peers,
Viewed his own fields, and with a golden plow
Broke earth himself to honor husbandry.

No man or woman in Peru attained
Old age unwedded: for, within that realm,
When four and twenty Aprils for a lad,
And eighteen for a maiden, brought no spouse,
Each was enjoined to find a mate; if still
The young delinquents plighted not their troth,
The rulers of the land, first counseling
With parents of a destined youthful pair,
And then the pair themselves, ere long compelled
An interchange of nuptial vows. For soon,
The Inca on his tour would reach the town,
And taking the hands of damsels and of swains
Within his own, would join them, two by two,
Declaring in the presence of the throng
The twain were one. Beyond this simple act
No statelier ceremonial was known.

But no man in the realm might ever seek
A bride beyond that little neighborhood
Wherein his parents dwelt: he could but choose
Among the playmates of his boyhood years.
When joined in wedlock, every pair abode
In the same region where the two were born:
Here where their gray forefathers lived and died,
They too, must live, here too must till the soil,
And rear their children, who, within their time,
Must ever linger in the same old home.

The Incas wedded hundreds in a day:
When all were mated, a great festival,
With music, dance and feast began: in mirth
And joy the jubilee continued. There
Harps twanged and tingled; viols plaintively
Beseeched, bewailed and sobbed; the hoarse-voiced
drums

Mumbled and roared and grumbled: tinkling bells
Kept gladsomely in time to gladsome feet
Of youths and maidens, following airily
The trip and twinkle of their nimble toes.
From happy groups rose peals of laughter: songs
Of love and courtship, sweetly passional,
Trilled from the amorous lips of boys and girls.

As brothers, when their sire hath passed away,
In justice and in peace amongst themselves
His little farm divide, these people made,
Yearly, a just division of their lands.
Each pair, when first united, found a home,—
A wee hut and a tiny plot of ground,—
Made ready for them. When that year had passed,
The land was nicely parceled out again,

And this division for a twelvemonth stood,
All being reapportioned at its end.
For each babe coming to a wedded pair,
Another little plot of ground was given,
Though twice as much was added for a boy,
As for a girl: so thus the years went by,
The farm increasing as the family grew.
No idlers might be found in all the realm;
Each faced his task, and faced it willingly.
But no one toiled beyond his strength; not one
Was bowed with burdens heavier than his share.
The drudgery of the mines could not be borne
By any peasant save at intervals.
The old and feeble toiled but little: they
Lived out their sunset years in placid ease,
Their wants relieved with filial piety.
No man was rich: no man was needy. Thus
These innocent, artless people year by year
Lived out the simple story of their lives,
Contented, calm and peaceful, till we came.
O, reverend chieftain, on my dying day
My heart will fail within me to remember
That I made one of those who rudely swept
In storm and havoc through that quiet land,
And harshly woke it from its happy dreams.

A great lake, Titicaca, shines and storms
In a vast barren plateau of the clouds
Nigh to a league above the sea-waves, where
Perpetual Autumn broods. This lonely mere,
The ancient home of old Peruvian Gods,
Ever seems mourning for their banishment.
The highest of all waters of this world,
Amid a stony waste of desolate hills

Its melancholy surges sink and heave
In chilly, cheerless winds from leaden skies,
Or mirror in their depths eternal snows
That fleck the adamantine peaks above.
A land of marshes bordering on its shore,—
A wilderness of rushes and of reeds—
Spreads dreary as the barren scheme of life
To the eyes of one, who, weary of this world,
Lost, dazed and lonely, dreams of suicide.
The Sun himself, in pity for the earth,
(So runs the legend), sent two children down
To bear the torch of man's enlightenment.
Of all created beings most superb
Beneath the airy azure arch of heaven,
The Son came from the South; around his head
A golden halo circled; at his feet
Were opalescent clouds; above him blazed
Auroras in keen-pointed brilliancy.
Transfigured in aerial firmaments,
He paused a space; then through pellucid skies
To emerald fields of earth he floated down.
Scarce had his feet touched sod, when from the
 North,
Under the rainbow of a dying storm,
As radiant as a wild swan laved in springs
Outgushing crystalline from mountain snows,
His spouse descended in ethereal grace.
Fawn-eyed and flower-footed, glossy-haired,
She came to meet him with extended hand;
A smile angelical in joyance curved
The crimson crescent of her lips; her brows
Were wreathed in blooms celestial; underneath
Her footsteps, blooms celestial strewed the sod.
Bridegroom and bride, brother and sister born,

The heavenly pair first trod this earthly soil
Beside the shores of Titicaca Lake.
A golden wedge they bore: the Sun, their sire,
Had told them, "Where this wedge shall sink in
earth,

There must ye pause, and found a city." So
They traveled for a space until they reached
A rich green valley, where the golden wedge
Sank into earth, and lost itself forever.
They called the region Cuzco; for that means
A navel in the old Peruvian speech,
And this would be the centre of the realm.
Manco Capac, the brother-husband, there
Founded the city Cuzco: there he taught
The art of agriculture to mankind,
And Mama Oello, his sweet sister-wife,
There taught the women how to weave and spin.

Child of the Sun the Inca called himself,
For he and all his peerage claimed descent
From this blest pair, the offspring of the Sun.
Here, where the ever-youthful moon of May
Revels in flowery meads that never fade,
The nation grew and flourished: here the kings
Erected noble fanes with splendid shrines.
Vast palaces and hugest fortresses
They reared with stones of such prodigious bulk
That one must ever wonder by what power
Men dragged them from their distant quarries. Oft
These mighty stones were of such length and breadth,
That two-score men, encircled hand in hand,
Could barely reach around; their height so great
A giant scarce could overpeep the brow
And sight a comrade on the further side.

No mortar knit the blocks, yet were they all
Fitted so nicely and so close together,
The keenest sword-blade might not edge between.
Great was the time, and great the labor, spent
To rear these massive walls: a thousand score
Of groaning slaves through half an hundred years
Toiled on one fortress ere the task was done.

The crown-prince of the Incas in his youth
By wisest men was taught. The nation's laws,
The rights of other nations, and the stern,
Exacting duties of his own high state,
Were urged upon his mind for earnest thought.
He and his chosen comrades, sons of peers,
Were tutored in the arts of war: they learned
To box and wrestle, wield the bow and spear:
The toils and hardships of a life of arms,
More trying than a peasant's drudgeries,
All underwent: they drank from mountain springs,
Ate but the simplest viands, slept on earth,
Went barefoot, and were garbed in coarse attire.
If they proved worthy after these stern trials,
The youthful crown-prince and his high-born friends
Were then exalted to the knightly rank.
Their ears were bored, and earrings huge in size,
Great golden circlets, from the lobes were hung,—
Such weighty ornaments, they swung the ears
Like bat-wings to the shoulders. Now the youths
In robes of manhood all were garmented;
Maids girded golden sandals on their feet,
And wreathed their heads with evergreens and flowers.

The highest of the highest paladins
Durst not approach the Inca, save with eyes

Downcast, with feet unsandaled, and his back
Bending beneath a fardel, to evince
Profoundest homage to his mighty lord.
The royal robe, of fine vicuña wool,
With golden lace was edged, and strewn with gems.
Two plumes the monarch's scarlet turban bore,
Plucked from a bird that, rarely seen of men,
Haunted lone mountain deserts. Every king
On coming to the throne, from the High Priest
Received the sacred feathers, freshly plucked.
Only one pair of these mysterious birds,
(The peasants all avowed), were known to earth,
And no rash huntsman, who in trackless wilds
By chance beheld them, dared to turn his bow
Against the heavenly creatures; for a sure
And speedy death awaited him whose hand
Uplifted in the sacrilegious deed.

The Inca made his journeys through the land
On golden litters set with emeralds:
If once they let their royal burden fall,
The bearers suffered death. Along the way
Flowers were scattered: fifes with piercing cries,
And flutes with notes melodious, thrilled the air;
Sonorous horns resounded, cymbals clanged,
And wayside multitudes acclaimed their king.

Unlike strong forest-trees that stand alone,
Braving the winds and lightnings, but like vines
That cling for aid on others, the Fine Arts
Must know a gracious patron to attain
Their choicest flower and fruitage. In this realm,
These gentle clinging arts from royal hands
Received the tenderest and most generous care.

Without, the Inca's palaces seemed rude;
Within, they blazed with weird magnificence.
There gold and silver vessels flamed and glowed;
There gorgeous carpets lay on gilded floors;
The walls and ceilings, overlaid with gold,
Were wreathed with shapes of blossoms, fruits and
 leaves,
Of birds, and ears of corn, wrought cunningly
By patient goldsmiths skilled beyond compare.
The gardens blazed with throngs of glorious flowers
Like constellations of resplendent stars.
In limpid fountains, fishes pink and blue,
Green, silvery, golden, sported and leaped and swam.
Delicious fruits, purple, yellow and red,
Hung down from sighing, overloaded boughs;
In verdant glooms of never-fading trees
The song-birds gurgled from the dawn to dusk.

The Inca wedded wives innumerable:²⁵
In noisy, idle be vies, all the day
They chattered through the harem like a flock
Of parrots in a tropic wilderness.
The monarch's children, too, were known by scores,
Or even hundreds: like a goodly tree,
Whose wealth of fruit encumbers every limb,
And scatters in profusion at his feet,
So seemed he with his countless progeny
Hung on his neck, or holding fast his hands,
Or swarming in a legion by his side.

The eldest son succeeded to the throne;
With high nobility his brothers ranked.
Whenever an Inca died, the whole domain
Was draped in blackest mourning; poets hymned

His noble deeds in plaintive elegies.
His wives were immolated on his tomb
In frighted legions; many slew themselves
In frenzy at the passing of their lord:
The palace rang with shrieks and screams and groans
Of maddened suicides, and golden floors
Turned crimson with the rivers of their blood.
When one king died (so reads the chronicle),
Four thousand human lives were sacrificed
In honor of his shade.²⁶ Four thousand lives!
Each city street, each country lane, grew wild
With lamentations. Death, omnipotent,
Stalked everywhere. The farmer left his plow,
The swain his herd. Even Life itself appeared
But one vast funeral journey. Songs of joy
Died into hymns of death. The very birds
Seemed frightened as they ceased their carolings,
And chirped in monotones through all the groves.

There was a spirit worshiped in Peru,
Called Pacamahac, the highest of the gods,
For this name signifies, the wise men say,
"He who sustains and gives life to the world."
Great was the Sun amongst all deities;
Next came the Moon, his sister and his spouse,
And then the stars, their children: of the stars,
Venus, the orb of dewy brilliancy,
Was called "The youth with long and curling locks,"
And worshiped as the fair page of the Sun.
The Thunder and the Lightning, who in storms
Wreck the dark heavens, and the Rainbow, arched
In dreamy beauty as their tumult ends,
Were likewise emissaries of the Sun,
Adored in temples raised throughout the land.

Amidst the holy city, Cuzco, reared
The great and glorious temple of the Sun.
Its wondrous chambers all were gilt with gold,
For this bright metal the Peruvians called
"The tears wept by the Sun." The western wall
Of the vast chapel sacred to this god,
Displayed a mighty image of his orb,
A human face that darted rays of light,
All graved from solid gold, and starred with gems.
At morning, when the Sun rose in the east,
He blazed upon his earthly image there,
Which, like a mirror, threw his splendor back,
Reflecting glory unto glory: then
The golden walls and floors and ceilings flamed,
The graven birds and fruits and flowers took fire,
The diamond eyes of beast and serpent burned,
And all the temple's wild magnificence
Matched heaven's own sunrise with unearthly dawn.

Another chapel, decked in argent pomp,
Contained a vast blonde image of the Moon
Of virgin silver wreathed in silvern rays.
Still other chapels, sacred to the Stars,
Forever twinkled with resplendent gems,—
With diamonds and with sapphires,—stars of Earth.
The Thunder and the Lightning each had shrines,
Barbaric in their rich embellishments.
Another chapel, to the Rainbow given,
Glowed, like its god, in varicolored hues
Of jasper, opal, ruby, and emerald.

Within this fane was ever kept a fire,
Which, once extinguished, boded untold harm,
And vestals, white-robed virgins of the Sun,

Watched, ever zealous, by the flickering flame.
To life-long chastity these maids were bound:
She who, among these, broke her solemn vows,
Stripped of her snow-white robes, and garbed and
veiled

In blackest black, was dragged with curses forth,
And in some dark and solitary waste
Buried alive. Her lover, singled out,
Was strangled at her low unhallowed grave.
The village where her paramour had lived
Was laid in ruins; on the site accurst
No habitation might be reared again:
There neither voice of man, nor woman's songs,
Nor laughter of little children, evermore
Would greet the lonely pilgrim passing by.

The censers, altars, and the graven shrines,
Were all of gold or silver in this fane:
Twelve argent vases, of prodigious size,
Bore golden ears of corn, with silvern leaves,
And silvern tassels, frail as gossamer.
The bodies of the Incas and their queens,
At death embalmed, the temple's doors received.
There, circled round the image of the Sun,
Kings on the right and queens upon the left,
In splendid royal robes, on golden thrones,
Their heads bent down, hands folded on the breast,
In melancholy majesty they sat,—
Helpless and silent, waiting sadly still
From weary year to year, through solemn night,
Dim-lighted by the altar's deathless flame,
Or, morn by morn, bathed in the brilliancy
Of flooded glory from the rising Sun.

BOOK VIII

De Soto's Narrative continued—The Conquest of Peru—Pizarro defrauds De Soto and Almagro—The Isle of Puna—Pizarro, having provoked its people to war, is besieged in his camp—De Soto's voyage to the southern seas—Dance of the sailors—New constellations in the skies—De Soto brings reinforcements to Pizarro—Landing in Peru—The storm and its rainbow—Stratagems of the natives—The entry into Tumbez—The old woman, its only inhabitant—De Soto undertakes to explore the interior—Battle with the Peruvians—De Soto discovers the Great National Road of Peru—He receives an envoy, bearing gifts from the Inca—He then returns to Pizarro's camp, and tells Pizarro of the past history of Peru—The great Inca, Huayna Capac—Omens of the evils to come—Atahualpa, the Peruvian Inca—His victories over Huascar—March over the Andes—De Soto and Hernando interview the Inca—De Soto displays his horsemanship—The banquet, and song of the maiden.

WHEN first Pizarro sought me for my aid,
He pledged me, next himself, the second place
In leadership. But soon each petty act
Favoring his kin, a partial mind betrayed,
Putting my rank in question with that horde.
Ere he had sailed for Spain his word he gave
To seek commissions at the royal hands,
Dividing fairly with Almagro, all
The rights of conquest and the spoils of war.
Instead, all titles, dignities and powers
Himself he seized. Almagro, thus ignored,
Was left the crumbs his colleagues threw away.

Hernando quarreled with Almagro,—sought
To bar him from their councils,—but his plots
Francisco vetoed, knowing well, in sooth,
That with Almagro out, their paltry force
Would shrink to nothingness. With honeyed words
He sought Almagro, soothed his raging heart,
And thus prevailed upon the veteran
Not to desert them in their crisis. Thus,
All plans at last matured. Pizarro first
Sailed with his brothers in a little fleet;
I followed next; Almagro later still.

Embosomed in the blue Peruvian seas,
The Isle of Puna rears in radiant green,
A clump of noble forests; fronded palms
And tufted bamboos, wreathed with flowering vines,
Uplift perpetual verdure to the skies.
Beyond a gulf, through the soft azure haze,
Dim in their dreamy undulations, rise
The mystic and poetic mainland hills.
Beneath them, on a red and yellow beach
That shimmers in the fiery tropic sun,
A quaint old slumbrous village of the south,
Gleams Tumbez, whitening in the torrid heat.

When first Pizarro with his buccaneers
Had landed on these shores, the Puna tribes
His advent hailed, and welcomed him with gifts,—
With what a black requital in the end!
They who have voyaged unto desert isles,
Tell us that oft the simple creatures there
Roaming the wilds, not knowing man, are tame.
The innocent bird upon his outstretched arm
Will perch: the doe, soft-eyed and velvet-limbed,

Fearless, will come and eat from out his hand:
And oft, too oft, the treacherous human brute
Will slay by thousands those who have trusted him
Only too well. So here Pizarro won
The faith of these poor people, took their gifts,
And feigning good-will, sailed away with smiles.
But now returned, he robbed their fields of corn,
Fired all their towns, and seized as hostages
Their highest chieftains. By and by, he sent
These captives to the chiefs of Tumbez,—foes
Of Puna and its natives. With a shout
Of frightful savage joy, the Tumbezines
Fell on the prisoners, and with clubs and spears
Mangled or brained them, then with hoots and yells
Tossed them along the beach to glut their dogs.
Thus wronged, the islesmen rose. Seizing their arms,
In overwhelming numbers down they rushed,
Seeking, in rage, with one decisive blow
To sweep the Spaniard from their world forever.
But how could lances, bows or javelins,
Wielded by naked savages afoot,
Avail against a band of cavalry,
With muskets armed, and panoplied in steel?
Like flaming dragons vomiting iron hail,
Bellowed great cannon through the startled woods,
Arousing dreadful echoes, that since Time
His journey at creation first began,
In deep unbroken solitude had slept
Amid that dark and pathless wilderness.
In terror fled the savages, but not
Till many a Spaniard fell. And through the days
That followed, bands of lurking islanders
From ambush sorely vexed their foes. They pounced
On every forager whose feet had strayed

Beyond the camp, slaying each hapless wretch
With nameless tortures. Venturing once from sight,
No man was seen again. Pizarro thus,
Despite his victory, chafed in fearful straits.

Now came my call to regions unexplored,
To undiscovered shores by alien seas,
Beneath the unfamiliar austral stars.
Great was the hazard of that perilous quest
For bourns of marvel and of mystery.
Our bodeful hearts hung timid, and we shrank
Before the gateway of that secret world
Of myth and dream and legend, where the powers
Of Ignorance and of Superstition kept
Their ever-jealous guard. Roused by and by
At bugle-call, we stamped reluctant feet,
And set our faces south. In time, our keels
Cleaved pathless oceans for the Great Unknown.

The brown barefooted sailors laughed to see
Our crowd of young land-plodders slip and slide
On feet unschooled to swaying decks. When one
Would reel and totter, from their hairy throats
Contemptuous merriment in great guffaws
Would bubble and explode; when one would fall,
Some grim sea-mastiff in a raucous burst
Would cry out, "See this pink-cheeked cavalier!
He danced fandangoes with his lass on land,
And now, to prove his legs are nimble still,
He tries to dance fandangoes out at sea!"
These rough and weatherbeaten veterans
As harmless coxcombs looked upon us all.
They deemed me but a witless popinjay,
Bound on a madman's venture.

But at times

The younger sailors in a dance moresque
Would earn our plaudits. Coming on the deck
Barefooted, wearing turbans all aglow
With saffron and with scarlet, in their ears
Great hoops of gold, with ribbons red and blue
Tied round their arms and over their shoulders
thrown,

Their graceful measures would begin. On high
Some clicked and clattered castanets, while others
Thumped, tapped and rattled tambourines: about
Their naked ankles little bells were hung,
Which, while the dancers lightly swayed their feet,
Would clink and clang and tinkle merrily.

Quaint little isles we passed, and spied afar
Their tiny summits, fringed with feathery palms,
And golden beaches, marged with cream-white surf
From steel-blue billows of unslumbering seas.
We watched the dolphins, that, like playful boys,
Dived in the spume that scattered from our prows,
Or gazing heavenward, oft our eyes beheld,
Soaring, or wheeling in an airy cirque,
Majestic and serene, the albatross.
We watched the pageant of the mainland coast,
Its dim blue promontories, and its capes
Delusory in amethystine haze,
Cheating the eye that judged them near at hand
When weary leagues away. Oft we descried,
Wreathing those heights, clouds from volcanoes rise
Like smoke upcurled from huts of giants, while
Above their darker brethren of the range
Glimmered the pure and spotless peaks of snow,
Like marble domes on palaces of gods.

On deck we passed the equatorial nights
Whose heated darkness throbbed with mystery.
We saw the round moon, like a great doubloon,
Arising from a sea of melted gold.
As we sped further southward, like a friend
True to the end, but called at last by fate
To leave us for some world beyond the tomb,
The Northern Star was drowned in ocean waves.
Through gloomy gulfs of unknown firmaments
New constellations scattered splendid
In twinkling archipelagoes of fire:
The jeweled Scorpion glittered overhead,
Canopus led the Centaur through the heavens,
And like a beacon blazed the Southern Cross.

After a prosperous voyage, safe at last,
We came to Puna with an hundred men,
Chosen and culled, and veterans all in fight.
Our caravels brought swift war-horses, arms,
Great sacks of corn, and varied implements
For use in exploration and survey.
We reached our comrades at the fateful hour:
Pizarro, hounded by relentless foes,
Was hemmed and huddled in a little camp
Beside the seashore; here, from day to day,
Beleaguered narrowly, he looked and longed
To sight my welcome little flotilla. So,
When first our sails he spied, he laughed and cheered,
And when we landed, rushed with shouts of joy,
Exclaiming, "Here at last our saviors come!"

When begging me to aid him in his plans,
Pizarro had not half the truth revealed:
I knew not that the simple islanders

Who had met the ingrate with extended hand,
Would be rewarded by the torch and blade.
The natives now he blamed for all his ills:
"These infidels," he growled, "are treacherous fiends,
Who, unregardful of their solemn pledges,
Have waylaid, tortured, and then slain our men,
Without a cause save their own lust for blood."

Now, since all danger from the Islanders
Was over, every mind at once was charged
With grave surmises of the one great Task,
That, still unfinished, ever called us on.
What dark forebodings hovered round our hearts!
We shudder as we hear, amid the gloom
Of solitary woods when day is done,
The night-bird weirdly calling. But those cries,
Freezing our blood with terror, are, in truth,
But notes of tenderness and love, whereby
That creature wooes his mate. And in those hours
Of darkness, every shape, however sweet
Or innocent, becomes a thing of dread.
When day returns, the bony spectral hand,
Shaken in menace at us, we may find
A slender blossomy bough. The huge black fiend
Barring our pathway, at the dawn appears
A copse of roses decked in silken bloom.
The pallid sheeted ghost, whose gliding form
Chills us with horror, in the morning light
Becomes a gentle snow-white lamb. So thus,
Standing before that world of mystery,
The haunt of unknown perils, everything,
Seen or unseen, was feared. Though in the years
Thereafter, legions of those fears proved false,
How they appalled us, groping through the dark!

Ere long, Pizarro bade the troops embark,
Row to the mainland, quell the Tumbezines,
And swoop upon their city. I was sent
To cross the sea-arm at its narrowest pass,²⁷
Not far from Tumbez; next us he embarked
Hernando with his troop, but on a course
Southward, that led them to a little cove
Wellnigh a half-league from the port we sought.
We crossed upon the islemen's raft-like boats,
Clumsy old vessels, hard to steer and row,
Each staggering with a handful of our men.
The heat glowed merciless; the oarsmen strained
And groaned and sweated; some grew faint, and
swooned.

The boats capsizing often, steeds and men,
Cast out to flounder in the rolling waves,
Would sputter half-drowned, struggling for the shore.

Long hours we spent in crossing. When at last
Our awkward boats had all attained the shore,
Suddenly, as if by sorcery, came a storm,
In swiftness and in fury such as never
The gentler northern climes behold. We fled
For refuge to a beetling hill, whose rocks
Jutted above a hollow nook: our feet
Had scarcely won that refuge, when the blast
Came roaring like a wild beast in our wake.
Now blinding flash came following blinding flash,
With crack on crack and shock succeeding shock,
Seeming to split the universe in twain.
Dazed by the thunder-claps that smote our ears,
We trembled, and we tottered on our feet
As the great lightnings hit the hill above,
Shivering its massive rocks. Like frail bamboos,

Snapping, great palm-trees fell, while tattered leaves
Went flying, mingled with distracted birds
That fled in terror from the tempest's wrath.
Black turned the day as night; winds roared and
 howled;
Vibrations and convulsions stunned the earth;
And in a wild black chaos cleaved with fire,
The world seemed sinking into Tartarus.

Down swept the rain in torrents. Then the storm,
With all the abruptness that its coming showed,
Suddenly ceased. Soon, like the gentle spouse
Of a black-browed, black-bearded robber chief,
Twining her arms around his hairy neck
And stroking back his shaggy locks, while words
Of love and kindness falter from her lips,
Soothing his rage, and winning his fierce heart
To mercy for some foe beneath his feet,—
A rainbow, lovelier than the Paradise
Beheld by saints when dying, curved above
The grisly horrors of that angry storm,
And wreathed his scowling visage in a smile.

The storm abated, soon our steps were turned
To Tumbez, lying scarce two leagues away.
But ere this time, some Islanders, (who now,
Affrighted at this peril from the north,
Buried their ancient hatred of their kin),
Had voyaged over, and warned the Tumbezines,
Who, startled at the tidings, took to flight,
And scattered bands of warriors through the woods,
In ambush to destroy us. Thus it was,
A throng of natives, as we journeyed on,
Came forward smiling, and exclaimed, "We wish

To welcome you as friends: come, go with us,
And greet our chief: he waits by yonder wood."
So over-anxious did they seem, I feared
A plot to snare us: "Tell thy chief," I said,
"That here, not there, he finds me." Answering
thus,

And scenting peril in their silken tones,
We waited for our comrades. \Muttering,
The paynims disappeared. Another band
Of Spaniards who had landed on the beach
Below us, by that selfsame treacherous crew
Were hailed. By the same artful stratagem,
The captain and his followers all were lured
To tangled wildwoods far from shore: when there,
From a deep swamp great throngs of savages
Rushed on them with a terrifying shout,
And slew them all. At still another beach,
Francisco, younger brother of our chief,
On landing with his squadron, was attacked.
Hearing their cries, Hernando hastened up
Barely in time to save them.

Late that day,

Pizarro came himself, and later still,
When overtaken by the other bands,
We marched upon the city. Not a man
Opposed us on the way. But when we reached
The town itself, no human face appeared
At casement or at door to greet our own.
Deserted, left to silence, desolate,
Stretched lonely streets with rows of dreary walls;
Seeming to stare upon us sullenly,
Reared blank, half-opened portals. In the heat
That blazed upon their whitened surfaces,

Buzzed drowsy wasps, while busy mud-flies sang,
And languid ants went creeping sluggishly.
There was no plunder for our eager horde;
No gold there was, or silver, meat or bread.
Our troopers searched and spied; each nook was bare;
A hungry mouse could not have found a crumb.

At last, before a ruined hut, we saw
A lonely beldame leaning on a stick,
Her back bent like a sickle. Locks of gray
Tangled and twisted at her neck, or streamed
In tatters downward. Clenched, her toothless jaws
Suffered an upturned chin and hookèd nose
To fit together like a parrot's beak.
Surely an hundred years upon that head
Had shed their snows! But her black eyes still shone
Brilliantly, for within them Hatred burned
Fiercely his torch,—burned it for us, whose arms
Would drive her people from their home forever!
Close in her knotty, horny fist she seemed
Strangling a serpent. Jabbering raucously,
And shaking her grizzled mane, she stood, and though
Her words we caught not, well we knew the hag
Cursed us with rabid frenzy. As we left,
Still we beheld her by that ruined hut,
Like the Last Man of aborigines
That, counted once by multitudes, reduce
To one, so that the One stands all alone,
Facing his old ancestors' hoary tombs,
The sole survivor at their Judgment Dawn.

Narrations fabulous had reached our ears
Depicting the riches of these realms; but still
We groped in darkness, knowing not indeed

The fiction from the fact. Without a guide,
A little band of stragglers, far from home,
We faced a foe of legions numberless.
The mountains reared like giant battlements,
Forbidding access to the Promised Land.
So I was chosen to explore the realm,
Study the people, note their fortresses,
Observe their cities and their villages,
And seek for roadways through the mountains. Soon,
With sixty mounted men, and targeteers
In number near a score, I sallied forth.

Like horns of great behemoths, peak on peak
Dim in the distance reared: eternal snows
Forever in their lone white silences
Remained aloof, untrod, unvisited,
Save when their spotless deserts dimmed in gloom
From slowly-passing caravans of clouds.
Great cataracts fell streaming from the skies
With everlasting thunders: from afar
Volcanoes rumbled, and their torches glared
Through never-dying winter's pallid realms
Like ghostly tapers lighting stygian shores.

Had not our leader wronged the islesmen, all
The mountaineers had greeted us as friends;
But like an evil spirit, everywhere
Before us ran the rumor of his crimes,
Arousing fear and hatred. So, ere long,
Among these cloudy uplands, we descried,
Two thousand strong, a host of dusky braves
Speeding toward us. Brandishing their clubs,
Waving their spears and shouting, on they rushed,
Not doubting that our slender little force

Would soon be swept before them. Drawing near,
Such swarms of feathered shafts their archers hurled,
Great flocks of angry birds of prey they seemed,
Snarling and screeching, armed with beak and claw
To slash and rend us. Soon their javelins
Hissed round our ears. Then twanged and whined
their slings,

Whose volleying pebbles whistled overhead,
Or thumped and snapped on ringing armor. Still,
Braving that storm, the bold Hispanic knights,
Like human armadillos, shelled in steel,
A phalanx irresistible, came on,
Compact and safe and snug, while arrows clinked,
Or harmless, broke and quivered upon the ground.
With cheers, whirling our falchions, then we charged;
Our brands on paynim shoulders fell in wrath,
Hewing with lightning speed through flesh and
bone.

Our muskets thundered, and their mouths spat fire:
Then, like a line of statues, (reared in bronze
To deck some lordly villa), that amidst
A flaming storm from fiery Ætna melts,
The dusky pagan line before that blast
Melted in slaughter. Those still left unharmed,
Dumfounded, shrank, or sped in maddened flight.
But as our horsemen dashed among their ranks,
Many poor savages, who had never beheld
A steed before, believed the horse and man
One creature only, and beholding us
Galloping down upon them, waving swords
And shouting, stood immovable,—transfixed
With terror. Noting this, their lives we spared,
Staying our hands from wanton waste of life.
The remnant vanished in an utter rout.

No man or steed we lost; but many knights,
Wounded, lay racked with anguish.

From that day

No other band opposed us: peacefully
The natives met us ever afterward.
We found a kingdom rich beyond compare:
Deep orchards teemed with luscious fruits, that glowed
In red and gold through green: in gardens trailed
Delicious melons. Bowered in bloomy trees,
Arose great mansions of the landed peers.
Abundant farms we passed, and grassy meads,
With flocks of llamas wandering here and there
Like ever-shifting clouds in skies of green.
We saw the plowmen drudging in the fields;
The plow a sharpened stake that one could guide,
Two other laborers, like oxen, yoked
Before it, tugged and toiled to draw it on.
Through villages of opulence we marched,
Where overflowing magazines of grain
The nation stored against the leaner years
When drought or famine dwindled earth's increase.
And then, most welcome sight of all, we found
The Great High Road, that marvel of Peru,
Which winds six hundred leagues through mountain
crag,
Spans the ravines, rapids and cataracts,
Meanders through the everlasting snows,
And leads on to the glorious capital,
Which else to man were inaccessible.
We shouted, overjoyed, to find the road,
For all our hopes now stood assured: behold!
Here was the highway leading to success,—
The key to Cuzco and its golden halls!²⁸

Among these mountains, suddenly one day
A tall Peruvian with a lordly air
Appeared before us. In his hand he bore
A silver wand; plumes nodded on his brows,
And round his shoulders hung a brilliant scarf
Of saffron and of crimson. With him came
Four menials, burdened low with splendid gifts.
Then he: "My gracious lord, the glorious king
Whom all Peru obeys, sojourneth now
At Caxamalca, in yon mountain range
Dim through the eastern haze beheld. I bear
His courteous greetings: it would greatly please
My royal master at some day not far
To grant you audience: and I bring with me
Some tokens of his friendship." Saying this,
He beckoned to the menials, who advanced,
And laid the gifts before us. In delight
And wonder we beheld three gorgeous robes
Of scarlet; six fine turbans, edged with lace
Of golden texture; mantles, that with plumes
Of humming birds in iridescent hues
Shimmered and flamed. And six great vases shone
Beside a score of goblets,—all pure gold.
And there were daggers bearing in their hilts
Sanguineous rubies; swords whose wrathful blades
Were quenched and cooled in sea-green emeralds
Studding their hilts and scabbards; and not least
In splendor, there were burgonets and shields,
With starry brilliants constellated over.

Bearing the gifts, our errant feet we turned
Back with the envoy to the Spanish camp.
Our friends again we saw: Pizarro met
The king's ambassador, and took his gifts,

Saying, "I greet thy monarch in return,
And thank him for his largess. Say beside,
That we shall fare to Caxamalca soon,
And there shall meet His Highness face to face."

In council with Pizarro I revealed
The story of our great discovery,—
The gaining of the highway long desired.
Exulting like a Cæsar, he exclaimed,
"The riddle is solved; soon, comrades, we shall be
The wealthiest of the wealthy in this world,
And knighted with a never-dying fame!"
I then related to Pizarro all
The history we had gathered on our quest
Of this great empire and its emperor.

In happy years, before our conquering fleet
Flaunted Spain's colors in those distant skies,
A warlike prince, Huayna Capac, reigned.
But not contented with his ancient realms,
He led his troops to conquest, and ere long
The great empire of Quito on the north
Bowed in submission to his potent arms.
The King of Quito, driven in exile, died,
Leaving a lovely daughter. Orphaned thus,
Forlorn, in terror, spent with tears, the maid
By ruffians of the conquering host was seized,
And sold to slavery. Learning of her fate,
The victor-monarch bade her masters bring
The girl before him at his palace. There,
Alone and unbefriended, at his feet
She lay, sobbing and trembling. Pity stole
Into his heart, and finding soon the key,
Opened the door and let Love enter in.

The flower of his harem, from that hour
The slave was slave no longer. In his eyes
No other queen found favor; in her arms,
Hers only, he rejoiced. A son she bore,
Named Atahualpa, and the lad became
His father's pampered darling. Still, the boy,
In love conceived, was not in wedlock born:
A younger scion, Huascar, born of one
Less fair and favored, though a lawful spouse,
Became the crown-prince, destined for the throne.

Time passed; and then the white man first was seen
Lifting his sails along Peruvian seas,
Whereat, the legends of the people tell,
Portentous omens terrified the land.²⁹
Great blazing comets streamed disheveled hair,
Startling the peaceful skies and quiet stars:
Terrific earthquakes hurled huge ocean waves,
Rocking the mountains on their thrones. The moon
Was circled round with vasty rings of fire,
Purple and red and yellow: meteors flamed
As in some great death-struggle of the gods

A thunderbolt fell from the raging heavens,
And burned a royal palace. Old men say,
At Cuzco, high above the central square,
An eagle fluttered, screaming with affright,
Describing vast gyrations in the air;
Fierce hawks pursued him, and their talons tore
His bosom, till his plumage, dyed in blood,
Came floating downward: soon they beaked his heart,
So that the eagle, sinking earthward, whirled
In convolutions fast diminishing,
Above the awestruck, frightened multitude,

Then plunged, deplumed and lifeless, to the ground.
The king himself beheld in nightmare dreams
The bearded white men landing on his coast,
Like messengers of vengeance from the gods,
Bringing destruction, horror and despair.

The old king, dying, called his elder sons
Beside his couch, and breathed his last commands:
"On thee, O Atahualpa, whom I love,
Though laws may frown upon thee," spake the father,
"Quito, thy mother's country, I bestow,
A goodly kingdom. It was once her sire's;
I conquered it; mine is the right to give,
And I return it now as justly thine.
Thou, Huascar, take the empire of the South,
Peru, mine ancient heritage and thine.
O sons, I beg thee, live in peace and love,
As brothers should: each let the other still
Be the undisputed master of his own."

Thus having counseled them, the monarch died.
A short time passed; affairs of state went well;
But soon the sons disputed: by and by,
Through the land raged a fratricidal war.

Their armies met upon a battle-field
Under the dome of Chimborazo's peak,
That, crowned with snow and ice, upreared through
clouds
His awful visage, like the God of War,
Rejoiced to see his altars red with blood.
All day with equal chance the battle raged;
Uncounted were the deeds of knightliness:
At sunset, Atahualpa's forces won,

And Huascar's cohorts fled the bloody field
Like dead leaves scattered by the winds of March.

The nightfall comes with far-extending gloom;
The brilliant afterglow from western heavens
Gleams blood-red on a world incarnadined.
The moon shines over Chimborazo's peak,
Its cold albedo white on ancient snows;
A nimbus round it circles; solemn winds
From off those lonely wintry summits sigh
Above the dead, and over dying men
Who join in moans of dolor and despair.

Then Atahualpa swept with torch and blade
Through all the northern princedoms; there he slew,
He sacked and ravaged with relentless hand,
Leaving those realms a waste of ruined tombs.

Again the forces meet upon a plain
Nigh unto Cuzco; here again they strive
From rising unto setting of the sun.
Blood runs in rivulets as legions die,
And tens of legions, wounded, strew the ground.
Dowed with the stubbornness of sheer despair,
The armies clinch like madmen. At the noon
No living man can tell where Victory hovers.
Death, girt with snaky furies, rides the field,
His lances like a leafless wilderness
In horrent bristles piercing overhead.
The uproar and the clamor startle heaven,
And shake the solid ground; shield shocks on shield,
And buckler smites on buckler, spear on spear.
Battalions clash together, and staggering,
Bludgeon each other with their broken swords.

Ere sundown, Huascar's army wavered; then
 Some fled; still others scattered here and there.
 A thousand faithful paladins closed round
 Their monarch on the hopeless battlefield;
 Like gladiators struggling on till death,
 Madly these fought the battle, till their foes,
 Swooping upon them in ferocious throngs,
 Slaughtered them man by man. The vanquished
 strove

With the wild desperation men display
 When Chance and Fate have hurled Hope to her
 doom;

But, heavy-smitten, all were overcome:
 Then Huascar, with his royal robes drenched red
 In the heart's blood of the chivalric knights
 Who sought to save him, fell a prisoner
 To him who in the past had heard their sire
 Implore them to be brothers to the end.

Then Atahuallpa's legions, hasting south,
 Laid hold on Cuzco. At the selfsame time
 I marched in exploration through the land,
 Seeking the Great Road to the Capital,
 The conquering Inca stood upon his way
 To Cuzco to be crowned.

Delaying not,

We started with Pizarro on our march
 Over the great sierras to the east.
 High up and higher still, we climbed and climbed
 By frightful gorges, cliffs like fortresses,
 By thundrous waterfalls, and on and on
 Through bleak and sterile fields of granite. Here
 The tropic gardens, sweet with fruit and flowers,

Were lost in trackless forests of the pine,
Dark, solemn and forbidding. Over these,
All forests disappeared; gnarled stunted shrubs
And scanty herbage fringed the rocky waste:
Still higher, glittered nooks of snow and ice.
We shivered in the cold,—a piercing cold,
Bitter and keen tenfold to men imbrowned
So lately in the glowing tropic sun.
At night, when lying on the earth to rest,
Great fires we lit, and huddling close together,
Sought for a little warmth and cheer; but still
Remorseless winter winds would sweep and swirl
Whistling around us, and we fretted and fumed,
Shuddering beneath their lashes. On these heights,
In the thin air, our heads reeled giddily,
Our ears rung, and we panted, out of breath,
As wanderers pant on deserts parched with heat.
Five dull cold days we groped through sodden clouds
That wrapped the whole world in a ghostly gray.
At length, a valley spread beneath our eyes,
Oval in shape, wherethrough a beaming river,
A thread of silver in a robe of green,
Ran, fructifying rich savannah lands.
A village neat and fair we spied afar,
With orchards, bloomy gardens, happy farms,
Vineyards and meadows and umbrageous woods
Spreading their verdure round its spotless walls,—
A tiny glittering speck of purest white,
Set like a pearl in the midst of emeralds.

The town was Caxamalca, so we learned.
Beyond it steamed and curled a vaporous cloud
From boiling springs: still further, we could see
The vast camp of the Inca's army spread

Like a strange mushroom city reared at night
To please the fancy of some fairy king.

And as a prince, come with his followers
From a far land to claim his promised bride,
(Whom he hath never seen, but whose fair face
Men have acclaimed as peerless), on a height
Above her father's kingdom, stands and sees,
Thrilling with glad expectance at the sight,
For the first time her distant palace-towers,—
So every gallant knight in our own band,
Looked downward on that scene so long desired,
Breathless, and flushed with wild ambitious dreams.

Next day at dawn we reached the village. There
We gazed in wonder on its streets and walls,
As white and clean as linen festal-robcs.
We halted in the plaza: gaping throngs
Of natives gathered, staring in amaze
On the white horsemen perched upon their steeds.
Dumb as their walls, transfixed with awe, they stood,
Answering no questions put them. But when asked
Where might the King be found? Said one, "He
bides

At yonder palace,—where you see a cloud
Of vapor rising from the plain." At this,
Pizarro bade me mount my steed, and take
Some chosen comrades with me to the king.
Beyond the borders of the town we rode,
And saw the white pavilions of the king
Rising above an undulating plain.
Reaching at length a broad swift-running stream,
My comrades swam their horses through, but I,
Spurring my steed, and urging him along

With a quick, low command, dashed breathlessly
Up to the brink, where, bounding high in air,
We overleaped the brawling rivulet—
A feat which made the brown men gathered near
Shrink, and cry out in wonder. After this,
Nearly a league we cantered; then we met
A squadron of Peruvians with their spears
Shouldered, and lightly slanting backward: none
Resisted us, or challenged. When we asked,
“Where may we find your monarch?” one replied,
“In yonder mansion bides our lord, the King”:
So we spurred onward to the palace grounds.

A summer house it was, engalleried,
And bowered in a mass of bloomy trees:
Its balconies and colonnades uprose
With slender fluted columns, white as shafts
Of moonlight, glinting through the verdant gloom
Of tangled intervening forest-boughs.
Below it dipped a rocky hollow, whence
Outgushed a bubbling fountain, crystal-clear,
But hotly boiling, plumed with misty clouds.
Circling this fountain, decked in splendid robes,
Were gathered high Peruvian noblemen,
Together with their daughters and their wives
In brilliant gowns and mantles garmented—
A tulip-garden glorious to the eyes.
Amidst them all was Atahualpa, garbed
In robes of purple. Round his royal brows,
A fringe of tassels worn by kings alone,
The crimson borla wreathed; and over that,
Uprising like a many-pointed star,
A crest of white and roseate feathers rayed.
A bracelet on his left arm loosely hung;

A gorgeous parrot, perched upon his right,
Preened plumes of scarlet and of gold and green.

In admiration we beheld this prince
Renowned and glorious. Neither old nor young,
He now had reached that noontide hour of life
When youth has vanished from the firm-set face,
And yet no lines are furrowed on the brow.
Like those of all Peruvians of his rank,
His cheeks were dark and beardless. His black
eyes,

Blazing anon and ever savagely,
Yet often would a languid ease assume.
His mouth, though firm-set, still from time to time
Would curve and curl in gentle winning ways,
As free and careless as a little child's.
Like a volcano diademed with snow,
And footstooled in a vale of fruits and flowers
While ever smouldering with Tartarean fires,
He, with his stoic ease and boylike smile
Half-hid, but quenched not, his barbaric flame.

Dumb as a god, nor sign nor sound he made,
Ignoring even our presence. As I gazed
Upon him, over me there crept an awe,
A deep, mysterious dread, I knew not why.
I seemed to tread dim deserts of the past,
A waste of cryptic immemorial tombs,
And dusty catacombs, whose mummied host
Recalled an age august, illustrious,
Now lost in ruins. Memories of eld,
Of long-quenched flames of long-evanished suns
That fired the hearts of long-forgotten kings,
Swept through my spirit like a burning dream.

But now Hernando galloped from the rear,
Leading a score of youthful cavaliers
Our force to strengthen: side by side we rode
Right into the presence of the Indian King.
Hernando, still remaining on his steed,
Saluting, said, "We greet thee, Sire, as friends;
For we have come from lands beyond the seas,
As servants of a mighty monarch there,
Who seeks the good-will of his brother-prince."
The Inca, though he marked with deep amaze
The bearded white men and their foaming steeds,
Assumed a careless manner, answering not.
But after an awkward silence for a space,
A peer beside him murmured, "It is well."
No other word was uttered: then I saw
The King with a distracted manner turn
His glances here and there, as if to say,
"You weary me; why should I care for you,
Your realm, your monarch, or your childish vaunts?"

But I perceived a passing lightning-flash
From out of the twilight darkness of his eyes,
And well I knew his studied carelessness
Betrayed the agitation, the suspense,
The smothered anger and the wounded pride
That quivered like an earthquake in his soul.
Yet soon I noted, scarcely half concealed,
His admiration, pleasure and amaze
When glancing at the stallion that I rode.
And truly was that steed a noble sight:
As black as midnight, wild as winter winds,
He reared, he charged, he madly champed his bit,
He pawed the earth, he flecked his breast with foam,
And flashed from ebon eyes a starry fire.

With wide-expanded nostrils, savage mouth,
And glorious mane, declaring haughtily
His lusty youth, hot blood and high descent,
In mingled anger and delight he neighed.
So, striking spurs, I bounded through the plain,
And overleaping hedges, walls of stone,
And brawling streams, I galloped far away.
We leaped one brook a score of feet in breadth.³⁰
Then coming back, I rode him round and round,
And though he pitched and vaulted, held my place
As easy as a ruler on his throne.
And now I turned him straight toward the place
Where Atahualpa sat with all his peers,
Sweeping upon them like a thunderbolt
Hurled from on high to smite them from the earth.
Some nobles, struck with terror, turned and fled;
But Atahualpa calmly held his ground,
Showing no fear or wonder at the sight.
I rushed upon him, and my horse's feet
Were poised to leap, and crush him; horrified,
The people shrieked and turned, or hid their eyes,
Not daring to behold those iron hoofs
Trample their godlike master in the dust.
But instantly I firmly drew the rein,
And checked the horse with such a practiced hand,
I nearly threw him on his haunches; thus
He halted just before the Inca's throne,
So close that dust bestrewed the royal robes,
And foam was scattered on the monarch's feet.
The startled parrot on his moveless wrist
Shrieked, screamed and fluttered like a frightened
child,
Yet even then the Inca wavered not,
But calmly smiled, and turned his face away!

Hernando, deeming this the timely point
His message to renew, tendered once more
His greetings to the King, who faintly smiled,
And answered, "Tell thy leader I will grant
A hearing unto him to-morrow morn."

At dusk the Inca summoned all his peers
To join him in a banquet where we sat
About him as the guests of honor. There,
To serve us as our handmaids at the feast,
A troop of lovely dusky damsels came
Enrobed in scarlet, wearing on their brows
Pale azure wreaths of clustered heliotrope
Whose odors charmed the air. Blithely they tripped,
With armlets and with anklets set in pearls,
With golden sandals glimmering on their feet,
While on their tiny fingers and their toes
Were little rings, twinkling with dewy gems.
Water they fetched in marble urns, wherewith
Our hands they laved. Then, these ablutions done,
With crisp and savory meats they tempted us,—
Plump fowls on silver chargers, tender quails,
Vicüñas roasted whole, and boar and deer.
And then they served us heaps of luscious fruits
With rinds of many colors,—golden-green,
Vermeil and orange, tawny and copper-red;
Some bulged with honeyed hearts; others were keen
With tangs of acid; some with sugared cream,
Or amber syrups oozed. But sharp or sweet,
In their rich flavors all were redolent
Of nectar and ambrosia of the gods.
They brought us berries from whose arteries
Dripped odorous blood, poignant as sparkling wine.
Likewise they fetched us nuts with knotty shells,

Or bearded, hairy husks, that gushed with milk,
 Or yielded ivory kernels from their cells.
 In glorious flagons formed of solid gold,
 Chilled from the chillest mountain snow and ice,
 Bubbled the purple, red and yellow wines.
 So, lifting jeweled beakers, merrily
 We cried, "Long life and glory to the King!"

Before the banquet ended, tripped the maids
 In dance before us. Then one damsel sang:

"As the waif from Antarctic strands
 In the fervid tropic heat
 Swelters and pants on desert sands
 That blister his weary feet;
 As he longs for the peaks of snow,
 Where the glacial fountains rise,
 And auroras glitter and glow
 In the clear, keen, frosty skies;—

"As the waif from the tropic shores
 In a chill Antarctic night
 Stands appalled while the bleak wind roars
 Through the frozen wastes of white;
 As he pines for the brilliant flowers,
 For the tart and honeyed fruits,
 And the flame-wing'd birds in the bowers,
 Whose throats are as silver flutes;—

"So, love, have I panted and yearned
 In vain for thy clasp and kiss;
 Yea, ever in vain have I burned
 To taste of that perfect bliss.

O, like a tremulous evening star,
So bright that it casts a shade,
The light of thine eyes, Istahar,
In shadow my soul hath laid.

“As the dust-covered leaves desire
In fever of parching drought,
Cool showers to relieve their fire,—
Crave I the kiss of thy mouth:
As the pilgrim, sunburned, athirst,
Seeks a palm-fringed fountain's brink,
So, loveless, unchosen, accurst,
I seek of thy love to drink.

“Yet spurn me or scorn me; for still
Thou canst not my soul repress
From drinking and draining at will
A fervent, though feigned, caress;
Though never I dare to touch thee, sweet,
I revel in honeyed lies;
On thy mouth, thy hands and thy feet,
I have kissed thee with mine eyes.”

BOOK IX

De Soto's Narrative continued—The Conquest of Peru—Pizarro calls a council of his officers, and reveals a plan to seize the Inca by treachery on the next day—The Priest Valverde advocates the project—De Soto earnestly opposes it—Hernando and Gonzalo speak in favor of the treacherous scheme, but are antagonized by their brother Juan—Finally Pizarro himself defends the plan, and the council decides to adopt it—De Soto is then reluctantly forced to act with the rest.

RETURNING to the camp that night, we found
The band in strange commotion. All had
heard

The message of the Inca ere we came,
And hurriedly Pizarro summoned us
To meet him at a council in his tent.
A plan he then divulged to snare the king
When come to meet us on the following day,
And having clutched his prisoner, next to claim
A fabulous ransom for his liberty.
Atrocious was the scheme, and I recoiled
In anger and disgust from all who came
Begging my aid. But many had been bribed
By artful promises, which, ere that night
Pizarro had in secret whispered them,
To aid him in the work of villainy.
I stormed, I thundered; hardly one I found
To second me.

The first of all who rose
In open council as the advocate
Of this dark project, was the zealot priest,
Valverde. Yellowish-white, his bloodless face
Seemed like a ghastly mushroom, spawned at night
From mouldy wood, nourished on clammy dews,
But now baked hard beneath the noontide glare.
Free from all passions, yearnings of the flesh,
Or human weaknesses, dauntless he stood,
Grim in his weird, unearthly eloquence,
For hell's own methods in the cause of heaven.
Had he but held the power, the whole wide earth
One desert waste of virtue would have spread,
Drear and delightless; and beneath his rule
Virtue herself had so repulsive proved
That all mankind had fled for sweet relief
Into the arms of Vice. Ascetic, pale
And haggard, knowing not of carnal joys,
The bird-songs and the blossoms of this world
He passed unheeded, dreaming but of heaven.
To save the heathen from the pangs of hell
Hereafter, he would make him suffer hell
Here, on this earth, and now. With a keen eye,
As sure as any grayhound's, he pursued
His victim cruelly and unerringly,
But only for that victim's good, as he
Verily believed.

And thus Valverde spake:
"My friends, this plan to seize the pagan king
You may deem harsh. But with this iron key,
Cold and inexorable, we may unlock
A treasure-casket packed with gold. As God
Once gave to Israel Canaan, so He now

Gives unto us Peru, our Promised Land.
 And He hath given it, not that we might glut
 Our maws with earth's abundance, meat or bread,
 Honey or milk or wine, but that our hands
 May rear His altar in this heathen realm,
 Where blinded paynims, made to see, may come
 Glorifying His name. To achieve this,
 Blood must be shed: then be it so: for some,
 A handful, must be smitten, the rest to save.
 What! do you fear to strike? Nay, rather fear
 To stay your hand. For did not Joshua,
 Through God's own power, retard the sun himself
 Like a torch-bearer chained on Gibeon,
 And stay the moon like a pale captive queen
 Low in the vale of Ajalon,—for this,
 That all the heathen might be put to death,
 And not one soul escape? And did not Saul
 Through God's decree, lose both his life and throne
 For sparing Agag, seed of Amalek?
 And did not Samuel, with his own right hand
 Smite Agag unto death, that God's command,
 By Saul dishonored, yet might be obeyed?

“Yea, we must save these people from themselves:
 A few must die, that multitudes may live
 Forever. Subjects now of wrath divine,
 Doomed unto endless flame, soon shall they be
 Of God's own chosen people, won for heaven.
 Friends, does a father shrink in coward fear
 From chastisement of his own darling son,
 Knowing that, should he stay his hand, the son
 Will grow in disobedience, sink to crime,
 And in his manhood only be at last
 But rotting fruit hung on the gallows-tree,

A loathsome feast for beaks of carrion-crows?
Say, does the surgeon fear to use his blade
For pity, when he sees the festering hand
Or gangrened foot before him, and he knows
That hand or foot, unsevered, must ere long
Destroy the man himself? My friends, that leech
Pities the sufferer, but he strikes to save.
So be it here with you. Strike manfully.
Better ten thousand times that these poor souls
Should weep one day in earthly agonies,
Than wail in agonies of hell forever."

He finished, and a mad March wind of cheers
Followed his last words. Then in wrath I rose,
Protesting. "Comrades! what black plot is this?
This Christless plan of treachery,—in whose brain
Was it conceived? Here, while upon our lips
We still may taste the viands of his board,
And still within our hearts may feel the glow
And sparkle of his wines, we hatch foul schemes
To seize our host, and throw him into bonds!
But you seek not to rob the king alone;
You plan to cheat your friends besides: for as yet
Almagro hath not joined us, and if you
Succeed, and wring this booty from the king,
You will deny him any share. Why not
Await him, not alone to win his aid,
Now sorely needed by our little band,
But likewise that all spoils he too may win,
And winning, share?

"What would our friends,
Our honest friends at home, say of this deed?
And what a triumph to our enemies

The story of our shame would be! This crime
 Would plant a dagger within every breast
 That truly loved us; it would place a club
 In the hands of all our foes; it would lift
 A trumpet to the lips of Fame, wherewith
 To sound our black dishonor through the world!
 But O! not even with our lives, nor yet
 With lives of countless millions still unborn,
 Would end the hatred of outraged mankind.
 For every man who advocates this deed
 Eternal execration waits!

"To-night

The blood-stained old Mosaic code a priest
 Quotes for our guidance. Rather let us lift
 The stainless banner of the word of Christ,
 Commanding that for evil we return
 Good. Yea! but now, ye pious Pharisees,
 Black wolves in white sheep's clothing, would return
 Evil for good. Ye snarl, and show your teeth,
 Lambs of the meek and lowly One!

"Haste not!

I hear a moblike fury in your shouts,
 I see a moblike frenzy in your eyes.
 This is not well. For Truth is a fixed star,
 And Error but a flitting meteor.
 Distrust that leader who would hurry you
 Into a crime with wild appeals, before
 Your sober afterthought can aid you. Pause,
 And let your reason dominate your passion."

I ended; but no murmur of applause
 My words approved. One only in that throng,

And that one Juan Pizarro, with a smile
Bowed in assent. And soon Hernando rose
To answer me. Bold, overbearing, loud,
His audience he sought to domineer
By brutal dogma, rather than to win
By subtle reasoning. Thus, then, he began:
"I am a man of few and homely words.
All rhetoric, with its tawdry flowers of speech,
I fling away, contemptuous. I arise
To simper no romances, and I listen
To none from others. I demand the facts.
White-livered, mushroom-hearted men may shrink
From the plain truth: I face it, eye to eye.

"The question we debate is not for schools,
Nor churches; nor for scholars, nor for priests.
It is now solely one of self-defence,
And none can rob you of that primal right
Of nature: none can blame you for its use.
If we seize not this king, his armed swarms
Will seize us: he who strikes first, wins the day:
He who delays to strike, delays forever.

"We have been asked to wait till others come
To share the spoils. This reason, to my thought,
Urges us all the more to smite with speed,
So that the booty shall be ours alone.
But if we wait, there will be nothing to share.
Sirs, if we haste, and seize the king to-morrow,
We shall be so exalted that the earth
Shall be too mean to touch our feet; if not,
There is no spot of ground in all the world
So lowly and dishonored as to yield
A grave to hide us.

“We are told that men
Will stand aghast on hearing of this deed:
Better that men should hate and fear you, sirs,
Than pity or despise! Spaniards! I give
My cause to no man’s conscience save mine own.
See this right hand! It grasps a coin of gold,
And doubled, rests upon my sabre-hilt:
That stout hand is my guard, its fist my friend,
That sword my passport, and that gold my slave,—
These, these alone, are loyal to the end,
And when I lose them, I have lost the world!

“I have lived long, and long ago this truth
Was burned upon me as with white-hot rods:
This brutal world is ever more merciless
Unto the man who serves himself unkindly
Than unto him who is unkind to others.
None stop to ask whether a shining coin
Was ever stained with blood. Honor and fame
Are only borrowed ornaments, that serve
To blind the eyes that search for truth: few ask
The nature of the heart their splendor covers.
The blackest puddle in the grimest street
Reflects the radiance of the moon and stars
As brilliantly as the most limpid rill:
So evil, beamed upon by all the world,
Seems as glorious as the good. Knowing that truth,
He is not wise who seeks the applause of men,
And he who heeds it not, alone is great.”

His words the crowd applauded lustily.
But young Gonzalo, waiting not to hear
The clamor cease, uprose impetuous
To fan the flame still higher, Handsome he stood,

With black curls tossed about his princely brow
In careless grace, and with dark liquid eyes
Like dusky meres that through the midnight shades
Mirror keen lightnings. "Comrades!" he began,
"They tell us that our enemies will rage
Against us when they learn that we have struck
This blow to-morrow. Be it so! Far better
To make your enemies stand aghast before
Your sheer audacity, than raise a smile
Upon their faces, as in idleness
And weakness you allow the prize to slip
Out of your hands forever. In this life,
To disappoint one's enemies, of all
Sweet joys is sweetest. We are told again,
That friends will look with horror on this deed.
Friendship! When did it ever clothe your back,
Shelter your head, or fill your hungry belly?
It is a star that never beams through clouds,
A dial that will only mark your hours
While the sun shines. Friendship! Friendship
indeed!

A flower to cling to in a storm; a web
Frailer than ever spider wove, to clutch
For safety when you hang above a gulf
Yawning an hundred fathom deep!

"Again,

They tell us that the people far and near,
Those born or unborn, will denounce this act.
The people, yea, the people! Who are they
But those who freed Barabbas, holding Christ?
Ever distrust that man who bids you bow
Before the forum of another's mind;
Distrust him, likewise, who would be a friend

To every man, and who would make each man
 His guide, his counselor and his oracle.
 He who is friend to all is friend to none.
 Therefore, in passing on this question, seek
 Only your own good, for, be all assured,
 If you now fail to win it, nevermore,
 Here or hereafter, will the outside world
 Lend even a pigmy's little finger to aid you."

Again the plaudits, like hoarse roars at night
 From hungry wild beasts in a desert waste,
 Assailed mine ears. But when they ceased, Juan
 rose:

With eye serene and gentle placid brow,
 He towered above the mob, and forced at once
 Silence, and rapt attention. "Friends," he said,
 "You know me as a man untaught, unschooled,
 Who can not scrawl his own name, nor indeed
 Read it when scrawled by others. Thus debarred
 From books, I have not learned what wiser men
 Have said, or would say, at a time like this.
 But thus much have I learned: that when I face
 Such weighty questions, I should ask mine heart,
 Mine own heart, shut in darkness though it be,
 What is the right? What is my duty? What
 Is the true pathway that I now must choose?
 And when I seek my conscience for an answer
 Until that answer comes, I ever find
 Thereafter, through some student of the books,
 That men more wise than I an hundredfold,
 Who flourished long ago, and left the world
 Their treasured learning in immortal tomes,—
 I surely find, I say, that men like these
 Attained the same conclusion, though they brought

Reasons to prove them which my simple mind
Might never comprehend. And here in part
My thought approves my brother's: Let no man
In a great crisis make another's mind
His one reliance. Look within thyself,
And though, like me, benighted, by and by,
Within thine own breast probing faithfully,
Thou shalt unearth the Truth, and know the Right.
In fiercest drought, in the most arid field,
Dig deep enough, and water will be found.

"It is no question then, with me to-night
Whether my friends would sicken at this deed,
Or enemies cry out, or all the world
Stand horrified: but to myself I stand
Accountable. Though I may fear the world,
And shun its condemnation, far, far more
I shun the condemnation from within,—
The self-contempt of mine own guilty soul.
Measured by these precepts, what is the scheme
Before us? Every man must say at once
That it is treachery; that it is trailed
With the hoof-prints of devils. Men of Spain!
Ye who uphold this infamy, do not call
On Christ to aid you, but Iscariot!
Seek not to lead the pagan into light,
But flee yourselves from darkness! Prate no more
Of saving heathen from the flames of hell,
When you yourselves have need of all the prayers
Of all the world to save you from the doom
Of Satan and his host forever damned."

A burst of mingled anger and dismay
From the assembled throng, when Juan had ceased,

Vented itself in furious taunts and cries,
And hoots and jeers. But when the tumult calmed,
Uprose Pizarro, strong, imperious,
Holding our ears with eloquence enthralled:

“We are but strangers in a hostile realm,
Severed from friends, two thousand leagues from
home,
Encompassed by a world of savages.
From sickness and desertion and from death
Left scarce two hundred strong, we face a foe
Whose king can overwhelm us with a million men.
We dare not fight these paynims hand to hand,
For though we stand superior in arms,
We can not front them on from day to day
Save by exhausting all our little strength
Within a fortnight. Should we lose one man
For every hundred that we slay, there soon
Would be no Spaniard left in all the land,
While myriads of Peruvians still would swarm.
We can not flee, for if we turn, the king,
Seeing our weakness proved by flight, would come
Pursuing: he would hound us step by step,
Swoop on us from ravine and cliff and crag,
Till every mountain gorge had quaffed our blood.
But, soldiers, should we in the end escape,
And homeward sneak again, Contempt and Shame
Would bray us welcome: loud the rabble throats
Would hoot and howl derision. O, no doubt
This little life is sweet, and bitter, death,
But rather would I perish in this land
By savage spears, than be a butt for jests
Of those who hate us,—those who prophesy
That this, our glorious enterprise, will fail.

You speak of foe and friend: be well assured
That failure at this hour would lose us all
Respect from one and honor from the other.
O, how those enemies would scoff and sneer,
And how the ones we love would hang their heads,
To see us straggling, unsuccessful, back!
Comrades! so far our lives are failures,—all:
Not one of us can boast of youth; alas!
Some now are old, still others growing old,
Yet all are poor, neglected or unknown,
Ignored by old-time friends more fortunate.
The world's great prizes, riches and renown,
Have all eluded us through all our lives.
Now is the hour to strike! Seize ye the king,
And all his followers, leaderless and lost,
Will scatter in confusion and dismay.
Unto their eyes the Inca is a god;
So if we prison him, as mightier gods
Will they adore us; then our day will dawn,
When all their realms imperial will be ours.
Come, let us vote! Say, shall we choose retreat,
Inglorious death, or shame still worse than death,
Or shall we strike for wealth and fame and glory?"

His eager eyes shone with a splendid fire,
His doughty form, replete with strength and force,
Was shaken by his martial eloquence:
A storm of shouts acclaimed him when he ceased.
And, truth to tell, since we had strayed so far,
How could we falter? By what other course
Could this, our last emprise, attain success?
And though I deem that hour of all my life
The darkest, yet that hour was sure to come
When first I gave consent to join that band:

Thus, then, I yielded, murmuring bitterly.
And so it is, that man shall ever find
One evil act will clamor for another,
One sin demands another for its mate,
And he who starts upon the path of wrong
Often is forced to keep it to the end.

BOOK X

De Soto's Narrative continued—The Conquest of Peru—The Spaniards prepare to seize the Inca through treachery—Atahualpa appears with numerous attendants and followers—Controversy between Valverde and the Inca—The great massacre—The Inca is made prisoner—He offers Pizarro an enormous ransom to secure his liberty—The ransom is accepted—Immense heaps of treasure; weapons, vessels and ornaments of gold and silver—Jewels and precious stones—Almagro and his troops arrive from the North—They are debarred from sharing in the ransom—Pizarro defrauds De Soto in the division of the spoils—Death of Huascar—Pizarro causes suspicion to fall upon the Inca, and delays his release—The writing on the thumb-nail—Pizarro's anger is aroused against the King—A great comet appears—Atahualpa's forebodings—Pizarro, with a sinister design, sends De Soto to another province—Last interview between De Soto and the Inca.

A T cockcrow every man aroused: our limbs
In the keen airs of the chill mountain morn
Shivered and trembled. As we sought to dress,
Groping and stumbling through the dark, our teeth
Chattered between our yawns: unsated Sleep,
Sullen, rebellious and persistent, still
Hung heavy on our weary eyes. We thrust
Quickly our garments on, and girded next
Our armor: hurriedly a little food
We then devoured. This done, our whinnying steeds
We saddled. Ranged about the central square

Were halls with earthen floors, and into these
We rode our horses: there we stood concealed,
Ready at any instant to rush forth
And overwhelm the multitudes that soon
Should throng the plaza. On the roofs above
Were cannon, grim in readiness, their mouths
An hungered for the horrid feast of blood.

Thus were we stationed: with his infantry
Pizarro held the center; I the right,
With cavalry; Hernando on the left
Stood likewise ready with his mounted men.
The horses' breastplates all were hung with bells,
To heighten the mad clangor of our charge.
Impatiently we waited; but long hours
Passed, and the King came not. The morning waned,
Noon glowed in dazzling radiance, and then died,
Yet still with anxious eyes we peered without,
Vainly, to sight our prey. But when the sun
Stood scarce two hours from setting, came a troop
Of servants of the monarch, singing songs
Wherein they voiced the glories of their King;
Of higher rank, next came another throng,
Bedight in robes of checkered white and red;
Then came still higher orders, garbed in white,
And bearing argent maces in their hands;
Next to these marched a guard of noblemen
With blue robes, jeweled bracelets, glittering chains,
And golden earrings in distended ears.
After them all came Atahualpa, borne
Upon a throne set on a palanquin;
The throne itself was wrought of purest gold;
The palanquin, of silver and of gold,
Was lined with glowing plumes of tropic birds.

The Inca's robes were gorgeous in their hues
Of violet and vermilion, like the clouds
Decking the sun at dawn. A wreath he wore
Of glittering golden leaves and fruits and flowers,
While round his neck an emerald necklace hung,
Each gem well worth the dowry of a queen.

They reached the plaza; there the splendid files
Were opened right and left, and through them passed
The Inca throned upon his palanquin
In majesty serene. Six thousand strong,
Around the square his guards and followers stood.
Our men, behind the treacherous walls concealed,
Breathless, awaited but one awful word
To rush without, and slay. Seeing us not,
"Where are the strangers?" asked the King. At this,
The black-robed priest, Valverde, sallied forth,
His left arm with a bible weighted down,
And in his dexter hand a crucifix.
Then quoth Valverde, "May I please the King!
I come to tell thee of the Christian faith."
The monarch sat amazed: "What means this man?"
He queried, "is he mad?" But, unabashed,
"Thy deities are false," Valverde cried:
"No creed is true save that we teach; no god
Is real, save the one we serve." The King,
Half angered, half amused, replied, "Avaunt!
Thy mouthing wearies me." But still unmoved,
Valverde cried, "Prince, from thine idols turn,
And learn the true religion that we bring."

"That trouble spare thyself," the King replied;
"What need to prate to me of God? The sun,
The moon, the stars, the mountains and the sea,—

These tell me with an eloquence sublime
Of Him who made them. Hast thou marked the
seed
Sprout from the mould? Hast viewed the scaly bulb,
Coarse and unsightly, shooting through its husk
A radiant lily to the skies? Or seen
The gnarled and twisted root thrust from the sod
A bough that blossoms with a queenly rose?
In boyhood hast thou seen the speckled egg
In a wild bird's nest, from the broken shell
Bring forth a feathered songster? Hast beheld
Before the day, in dim gray dewy light,
The trumpets of the frail convolvulus
Ope slowly, one by one? Then, if thou hast,
Think, man, how vain and futile are thy words,
Weakly reëchoing truths which Nature tells
In field and wood from twice ten thousand tongues."
Valverde bit his lip; impatiently
He blurted, "But this book I bear with me
Is God's own word, and it denounceth all
Who will not hear it." Then the monarch smiled
Disdainfully, replying: "Why should I
Waste time on thee? Thy puling sermons, man,
But fret me: cease. Why should I hear thee drone
Thy saws from dusty and moth-eaten scrolls?
He who hath kenned the daily miracle
Of rubied sunset, amethystine dawn,
Needs not thy fables nor thy mummeries
To know his God. Say, who directs the birds
In springtime through a thousand airy leagues
To northern shores, and pilots them again
In autumn backward to these tropic skies?
Who bids the dews at gracious hours of eve
Refresh the leaf and blossom? Do these come

To thee for guidance? Do they ask of thee
Their daily duty? Do they come and beg
Thine intercession at the court of God?"

Valverde shouted back, "Prince, do not dare
To spurn God's servant! I am here to speak
The will of Heaven; be not thou over-proud,
But hearken to that message!" Then the King
Frowned darkly, and he waved the priest away,
Saying, "Why need I with the servant waste
My moments, when the Master may be seen?
Why parley with a herald, when the King,
The King Himself, will grant me audience?"
Valverde, still persisting, cried aloud,
"Sire, thou art stubborn, but thy neck must bend:
The Pope, our Church's head, hath given us
Dominion over all this pagan land,
And thou shalt heed God's courier. Thou must learn
The annals of our church; of all our saints;
Of baptism and salvation, fasting, prayer.
But first I tell thee of our Lord, the King,
The mightiest, noblest ruler of the world;
Before him in obedience must thou kneel,
Becoming thus a tributary prince
To one more great, more glorious, than thyself."
Then Atahualpa quivered in his wrath,
Rejoining, "Wretch, I bend the knee to none,
But millions bow before me as their lord.
Your king can not command me; I will greet
His army as a brother monarch's force,
But vassal will I be to none but God.
Who is your pope, that he should make a gift
Of lands and peoples that he never saw?
Your God, they say, was nailed upon a cross;

My God, in yonder Sun, lives reigning still."
His dusky face grew ashen with his rage;
His twilight eyes were kindled into flame.
"And tell me," he continued, "Who commands
That I should bow my head to prince or pope?"
Then the priest answered, "This, the book I hold,
Gives us authority over thee and thine."
The Inca snatched the bible from the priest,
And scornful, hurled it into the very dust,
Exclaiming, "Varlet! I am not thy slave;
But I shall call thee and thy beggarly crew
To answer for your crimes throughout my land."

Valverde, quickly turning, cried aloud,
"Behold, Castilians, how the heathen scoffs!
Set on him now! I will absolve ye all!"
Pizarro gave the signal; cut we rushed,
Bells ringing, armor clanging, swords awhirl;
We shouted, and our horses reared and plunged.
Our muskets thundered, crashed and cracked and
 roared;
From roofs above us the artillery
Blazed forth destruction: so with frightful din,
Shocking of steely weapons, smoke and flame,
And shrieks and groans, the massacre began.
As some tornado in terrific might
Sweeps through a forest, hurling down the trees,
And dashing huts and hovels to the dust,
Till earth is overwhelmed with ruin, so
We swept upon those unsuspecting throngs,
Smiting down all before us. Glittering blades
Descended, cleaving through the multitudes,
While maddened horses crushed them underfoot.
The earth reeled drunk with floods of human gore,

And the wild heavens above us, rent with screams,
Shuddered, and shrank appalled.

Reverend Chief,

The memory of that awful crime of crimes
Will haunt and hound me to my dying day:
Come, let me haste to end the dreadful page!
The havoc ended not till late at night:
Together with the attendants of the King,
Nigh half the city's habitants were slain;
And some fled to the country, still pursued
And butchered by the horsemen as they ran.
But though at midnight twice five thousand souls
Were counted with the dying or the dead
Among the natives, no man in our host
Had suffered a mortal wound. The faithful peers
Who sought to shield the Inca, all were slain.
Pizarro found the monarch: left alone,
With scores of dead around him, with his robes
Bespattered red in blood, without a sword,
Or shield or helmet, stood the helpless King,
Yet still unmoved by fear. Pizarro cried,
"My liege, thou art my prisoner;" then he laid
His hand upon the Inca's arm, and led
His silent, unresisting captive forth
From scenes of carnage to a prison cell
In an old ruined palace on the square.

Now moans and lamentations through the gloom
Rising in awful cadence, made the stars
Shiver with horror: then, as one by one
The sufferers perished, the keen piteous wails
Lowered, or sank to silence. Yet far on
Beyond the midnight hours, he who awake,

Listened, would feel his heart with terror freeze
To hear unearthly sobs arise from those
Still living, but in agonies of death,—
Blood-curdling and uncanny, like the cries
Of lone lost night-birds haunting desert wilds.

To make his hideous crime more hideous still,
Pizarro bade the Inca sit at meat
Beside him in a hall that faced the square
Where mounds of dead rose isled in seas of blood.
When viands had been set before the King
There in the presence of his murdered friends,
He ate not for his utter misery.
The city now was plundered; house to house,
The vandals roved unhindered; soon their arms
Were loaded down with silver and with gold.
I, half demented, and unmanned by shame,
Stole silent to my couch; racked with remorse,
Sleepless I tossed there, till the break of dawn.

Not many days had passed before the King
Learned that, despite our leader's pious airs,
And all his solemn protestations, one,
And only one god, knew his worship,—Gold.
So, sending for Pizarro, "My good lord,"
He said, "thou knowest that my liberty
Above all things my heart desires. See here,
I stand tiptoe; my longest finger's tip
Reaches this height upon my prison wall.
Scan well this chamber, and the cell beyond.
If thou wilt free me, I will heap with gold
This chamber to that little spot you see
Touched by my longest finger's tip; and twice
With silver will I pack the neighboring cell,—

Yea, all that ransom will I gladly pay
To end this weary durance, and go free."
The room wherein the King was then immured
In length reached two-and-twenty feet; its breadth
Was seventeen. The King himself was tall,
And standing tiptoe, touched his highest mark,
Nigh eight feet from the floor. The neighboring cell
Was smaller, yet was not of pigmy size.
"Two months I ask," he said, "wherein to heap
The cells according to my pledge; when both
Have thus been filled, my bondage is to end."
Pizarro stood amazed; scarce could he dream
That such amazing treasures might be found
In all the coffers of all kings of earth.
He paused a moment; then in breathless joy
He answered, "Be it so: bring thou thy gold
And silver to this prison; when the cells
Are filled as thou hast pledged, thou shalt go free."
He promised, yea, he promised! How he kept
His promise, he must answer face to face
With Atahualpa on the Judgment Day.

At once the Inca sent swift couriers
Throughout his realm, the treasures to spoil
In all the temples and the palaces.
So all these stately mansions were deflowered
Of all their olden splendors. Jewels torn
From royal villas, and of such great price
Each might have bought an earldom, in the dusk
Of Atahualpa's dingy bondage-house
Glittered in glorious hills. The Inca's gods
Gave of their riches, that their captive son
Might wander free again: rare ornaments
Of finest workmanship, adorned with gems,

Their holy fanes surrendered for his sake.
From out the sun-like temple of the Sun,
Seven hundred plates of precious metals came.
In silvern radiance, massive goblets reared
With salvers and with ewers; strewn with these
Were vases, rings and bracelets wrought of gold.
A golden fountain lifted, with a jet
Of golden drops that sprayed in brilliant showers,
While golden birds and fishes leaped and played
About the waters at its golden base.
And there were quaint designs of fruits and flowers,
And leaves, and spears of grain, wrought skillfully
By master-hands. Soon Atahualpa's cell
Was heaped with gold, and the adjoining cell
Packed twice with silver. Never in this world
Had any conqueror gloated over spoils
That, matched with ours, appeared not poor and
mean.

Amazed, we conned the treasures manifold
Wrenched from this Ophir of the Occident.
The lucid lustre of the silver-heaps
Seemed moonlight streaming over peaks of snow.
Great ingots of the precious metals lay
Near bullion still unpurged of earthy dross,
And nuggets that with sullen splendor gleamed,
Like the dull gold of faded sunsets. Coins,
Peeping through shadows of secluded nooks,
Winked roguishly like saucy wanton eyes.

Here glimmered wreaths and fillets for the brow,
And splendid coronets and diadems
Fit for the lofty temples of a god;
And there flamed morions, poignards, halberds, glaives,

Embossed with gold and crusted over with gems.
From sumptuous beakers, wreathed in golden vines,
Hung clustered rubies simulating grapes;
Here tall amphoras beamed; gold butterflies,
Fashioned to lift them, clung on either side
With chrysoprase and beryl on their wings.
Great serpents lifted with carbuncle eyes
That flashed and scowled; their graceful coils were
zoned

With crimson-tinted garnets, while their crests
Sparkled with diamonds. Scattered through the
cell

Were golden blossoms, drenched in throbbing dew
Of lucid brilliants. Priceless emeralds,
Green as the eyes of love-lorn Jealousy,
Glared from the idol's unimpassioned brow.

From sword-hilts glittered solitary gems
Proudly aloof as lonely Fomalhaut;
Still others glowed like smouldering Saturn; some
With the cream-yellow of Capella shone;
Twinkling, some shed a pure soft radiance,
Like Hesperus, the lovely orb of Love,
While others reigned in royal arrogance,
Icily gleaming, like the Northern Star.
When over all those treasures blazed the light,
They dazzled and they smote our shrinking eyes
Like some astonishing and magnificent
Red sunrise over glowing desert sands

Uncounted riches swelled the leaders' hoards:
Each muleteer could pocket pelf enow
To tide him through five years of idleness.
At last my days of opulence had come;

Wealth's cornucopia rested in my hands;
My gold would win me Isabel: I saw
In blissful dreams, under my conquering feet,
The grandeur and the glory of the world.

But soon Almagro joined us with his force.
This aid was needed by our little band,
Yet most unwelcome were these allies now,
When spoils would be divided! In his plans
Pizarro had not counted on these friends.
"Ours only is the ransom," he declared,
"Since we have won it with unaided arms."
But hard it seemed, after these long, long years,
To cast aside Almagro. So I sought
Pizarro, saying, "Let us not hold fast
And strict to selfish rights; for though our claim
To the whole booty may in reason stand
Well founded, let us prove not only just,
But gracious. Since Almagro well deserves
Some bounty for his labors, at the least
Let us repay him for his grievous loss
Entailed in fathering earlier voyages."
But now Hernando, puffed with spleen, renewed
His old feud with Almagro: all the rest
Joined forces with the two Pizarros: long
They wrangled and disputed. In the end,
Almagro and his men were all debarred
From sharing in the prize. The veteran,
Cheated once more, turned with a cynic smile,
And shrugged his shoulders,—forced again to yield
To frauds that left him patched and threadbare still
After ten years of sacrifice and toil,
When scars mapped misery on him, and his heart
Was strewn with ruins of its perished dreams.

So now the peerless ransom all was ours.³¹
Ere the division, true to inborn craft,
Pizarro offered prayer: this done, he took
Three-fold as much as I received, and gave
Hernando more than two-fold. Not content,
To swell the hoard his arms already hugged,
The despot seized in hurried selfishness
The throne of Atahualpa, massive gold,
Bestarred with jewels, graven gloriously,
And worth a wealthy city in itself:
This done, his share was five-fold that of mine.
Angered, I rose to make remonstrance; then,
Remembering by what means the spoil was won,
I shrank ashamed from bickerings with that clan
Over ill-gotten lucre. And in sooth,
The share allotted made me rich indeed:
What cause had I to fret for more? These thoughts
Calmed my displeasure, and ere long I went
Well satisfied.

The Inca's ransom paid,
For disenthralment came his just appeal.
During the days of his imprisonment
I often went to see him, sitting down
Beside him in his dreary cell, to cheer
His drooping spirits with a friendly smile,
Or sportive jest, or bit of gossip, gleaned
About the camp or town. Sweetmeats and fruits,
Or choicest viands fresh from mine own board,
Often I took him, hoping thus to tempt
His listless appetite, that he might eat
And gather strength again. So, by and by
He would await my coming, knowing well
My footstep or my voice, and his dark eyes

Would brighten as I reached his door. Thus then,
Confiding in me as his only friend
Among his captors, he desired of me
That I should see Pizarro, and demand
A speedy liberation. That same day
I saw Pizarro; but I soon detected
A quibbling in his speech that made me fear
He purposed not to keep his pledge. "Thy words,"
He answered, "I shall weigh with care. Meantime,
With kindness have we kept the prisoner:
For naught he suffers. Had he felt the chains
Of some, like Cortez or Pedrarias,
Rather than ours, a sterner, swifter fate
Had claimed him." But I answered zealously:
"Sir, when we take the measure of ourselves,
Let us compare not our poor lives and deeds
With those of baser men, making the test
To our advantage: rather let us judge
Our works by those of nobler souls, even though
To our discredit. He who would surpass
Only the herd behind him or below,
May sink to their mean level: he who looks
To those beyond him or above, may hope
To follow close, even though not side by side."

Unsatisfied, I strode away. And now,
Aiding Pizarro in his base designs,
Came rumors that assoiled the Inca's fame.
For Huascar, then imprisoned by the king,
One night was drowned. Whether or not his death
Came through the Inca's mandate, who could say?
But what a rare pretext was here, whereby
To hold the captive still! In pious wrath
Pizarro sought the monarch, saying, "Sire,

This frightful crime, left unexplained, must turn
Suspicion toward thee: we are not deaf,
Nor art thou dumb: speak: who hath done this deed?"
"I know not," flashed the prisoner, angrily;
"Being myself a captive all the while,
How could I harm him? Whether Huascar died
Through murder or mischance, how could I know?"
Pizarro answered, "At thy prison cell,
Thy friends had speech with thee in privacy;
Thus hadst thou chance to issue such commands
As might have laid him low. I judge thee not
As yet: but whosoever planned this crime,
Himself must die." Evil begetting evil,
And rumor, rumor, busy tongues declared
That now the Peruvians, arming secretly,
Plotted to rise against us: hearing this,
Pizarro told the monarch, who in turn
Hotly retorted, "Heed thou not such tales;
My subjects are demanding my release;
They murmur, doubtless, at this long delay;
But none are yet uprising, and they wait,
Expectant only of my safe return."

In truth, despite his cry for justice, raised
Against a crime unproved, a trivial cause,
Or one that seemed but trivial, had aroused
Pizarro to this fury. For, one day,
One of his prison-guards the monarch called,
Saying, "My good man, write the name of God
Here, on my thumb-nail." This the soldier did:
Then the King showed the writing on his nail
Unto the other guards. Each read the scrawl,
And crossing himself, called out the holy name.
Greatly the Inca marveled at this feat,

The art of writing being then unknown
 Among Peruvians. When Pizarro came,
 The Inca showed the writing on his nail:
 Pizarro, all unlettered as he was,
 Stared with a stupid stare, confessing thus
 Himself more ignorant than these guardsmen: then
 With unconcealed contempt the monarch smiled
 At one in high position so unlearned;
 He jested of it to his friends at times,
 Rousing a little breeze of merriment:
 Hearing these things, the despot choked with rage,
 And though his outward calm he soon regained,
 In his heart's depths he planned the captive's fall.

Now a great comet, startling earth and heaven,
 Amidst the black recesses of the night
 Blazed with a weird, portentous brilliancy.³²
 Deep yellow, shaggy like a lion's mane,
 It flung its hairy strands about the stars,
 And seemed to snare them in its mighty maze.
 The monarch then, with a despondent air,
 Said, "Surely, evil days are pending: once,
 When first the Castilians landed on our shores,
 My sire, Huayna Capac, lay in death;
 Through his last nights on earth, a comet blazed,
 A torch of wrath like this we now behold,
 Portending dire disasters to the land."

Noting Pizarro's dilatory pleas,
 Whereby from day to day he put me off,
 I now demanded that he cease delaying,
 And free the Inca. Pausing first, he said:
 "Tidings have reached me that the natives rise
 Against us in the southern provinces;

I bid thee take thy men, and see thyself
Whether these stories be untruth or truth;
If they be false, on thy return the king
Shall have his freedom." Artfully he laid
His plans before me. Never did I dream
What treachery lay concealed behind this ruse,—
That a foul plan of murder in his heart
Crouched like a scorpion with a deadly sting!

That night I sought the captive King, and told
Pizarro's orders. Starting, he exclaimed,
"Here is some plot for evil! O, my friend,
I pray thee, leave me not! In his dark soul
This man both fears and hates me. Shouldst thou go,
Leaving me at his mercy, I am lost."
"Nay, nay," I answered, "he hath pledged his faith
To free thee should I bring assurances
Proving this gossip false. Be sure, my liege,
That I shall go with speed, with speed return,
And bear thee thy deliverance." Answering not,
Deeply he sighed; then pacing up and down
His prison-cell, with folded arms, and head
Downcast in weighty thought, he seemed to wage
In his own breast a silent battle. "Well,"
At last he muttered sadly, "let it be.
No longer will I beg thee stay. Perchance
Thy counsel is the wiser, though alas!
My heart misgives me."

Then the King stood still,
With his brow lifted to the mystic stars
That twinkled as in tearful sympathy
Through his dark prison bars. And I beheld,
Far, far away, through those relentless bars,

The myriad splendors of the galaxy,
Like a great wreath around the brows of God.
There likewise flamed the comet, vast in breadth,
Angry of hue, and wildly ominous
Of some dread fate impending. Ah, how weird,
How eery was that scene,—the trembling stars,
The radiant galaxy, the comet's flame,
And the dark face of the unhappy prince,
Turned upward from his prison-cell! My heart
Sank in my bosom with a nameless fear,
And Prescience, like a Sibyl old and gray,
Seemed to steal by me, whispering in mine ears
Dim, direful prophecies. And above all,
The King himself, as moveless as a man
Painted within a picture,—with what awe
I gazed upon him in that solemn hour!

The scion of a dateless dynasty,
The monarch stood before me: who could tell
What weary-footed years had nursed his race,
What hoary æons, worn millenniums?
Amid that mournful gloom I seemed to hear
The matins and the vespers of his race,
Its morning orisons, its twilight dirge,
From youth to age, from genesis to grave.
Here stood the vicar of once-glorious gods,
That now, dispurpled and undeified,
Would awe men's hearts no longer, nor again
Would gaze on bended knees of votaries
In supplication; but as dreamless dust,
Shut in their dank and dark necropolis,
Must unresponsive lie, and be themselves
Neglected and forsaken by the world
Through the endless midnight of oblivion.

I seemed to hearken to unearthly plaints
Of mitred white-robed pontiffs, who in tears
Chanted the obsequies of those so long
The masters of their lives, their hearts, their souls,
But now dethroned forever, and the prey
Of dissolution; and I heard them sing
The requiems of their old-time Faith, that once
Was haven of their hopes, their port of prayers,
Their refuge from this world in that to come.
These things I seemed to see and hear; but lo!
I saw, gigantic, overlooming all,
Earth's only true immortal,—deathless Death!

As the time came for parting, I exclaimed,
“Unjust it is that I should wander free,
Favored of fortune, and in ease of mind,
While thou art fettered here! Bitter indeed
Must be thy thoughts against a partial fate
That gives thee misery and thy neighbor joy.”
“Nay, nay,” replied the Inca earnestly,
“When I am bowed with grief, let me not say,
‘Lord, I am cheered in mine adversity
To know that countless thousands in this world
To-day are bowed with burdens heavier
Than those allotted unto me.’ Let not
The selfish thought that hearts of others ache
With pangs more poignant than mine own, be made
A balm to soothe me to contentedness.
No, rather let me say, ‘Though I am thrall
To sorrow, it is comfort unto me
To know that countless others at this hour
Are glad of heart. I thank thee that my gloom
Eclipses not the noontide of their joy.’
O, brother, though my hearth be desolate,

Lonely and dreary, let my solace be
To know that in thy house are warmth and love,
Dancing and feasting, and the sound of mirth:
Yea, brother, let my worthier comfort be
To know thy path is bright though mine is dark."

BOOK XI

De Soto's Narrative continued—The Conquest of Peru—Pizarro and his officers, taking advantage of De Soto's absence, hurry the Inca to trial—Atahualpa appears before his accusers, and speaks in his own defence—Valverde and Almagro, and Hernando and Francisco Pizarro, advocate the condemnation of the monarch—Juan Pizarro alone arises to speak in his favor—The Inca is condemned to death at the stake—But Valverde induces him to renounce his religion, and receive baptism, whereupon he is sentenced to be strangled—The Inca's last request of Pizarro—The sacrament is administered to him, and he is then put to death—Pizarro and his comrades, simulating grief, go into mourning for their victim—The wives of the Inca slay themselves—The death-hymn of Amalissa, the favorite wife—De Soto, returning, denounces Pizarro for his treachery.

SOUTHWARD I started with my band at dawn,
And not till nigh a fortnight passed away
Did I return. Enquiring everywhere,
Of peer and peasant, in the field or town,
I proved all rumors that assailed the King
But idle gossip, idle as the croak
Of idle crows flung to the vagrant winds.
But ah, not slow in rousing were the wolves
At Caxamalca with the King! For scarce
Had the last echoes of my horses' hoofs
Died in the distance, when the ravenous pack
Rushed on their victim. Though mine eye saw not,
Nor mine ear heard, the horrors of those days,

So many tongues have told me when too late,
That the whole story on my brain seems burned
By demons with a white-hot iron pen.
By heart I know that story, word for word,
And now, relating it to thee, I seem
Like an eye-witness of each fearful deed,
But though beholding all, chained hand and foot,
And impotent even to cry aloud,
"Villains, forbear!"

Almagro and his clan

Above the rest cried fiercely for his blood.
Though we had won vast treasures, they had not
Shared in one groat's worth; so they felt no tie
That bound them to our pledge of faith. Again,
They feared that, should the King be disenthralled,
He would arouse his people to avenge
Pizarro's treacherous villainy of the past.
"Long have we toiled without reward," they cried,
"And if ye set the King free, we must lose
All hope for speedy recompense, and seek
Only to save our lives. Forbid us not
To pluck the fruit now hanging in our reach."

The second night that followed my departure,
A mock-court was convened, and at that court
Almagro, the Pizarros, and the priest,
Valverde, sate amongst the judges. There
The charges were presented: one of these
Declared the king had compassed Huascar's death;
One of idolatry accused him, while
Another charged revolt against our sway.
The monarch came before them, garbed in state:
About him fell a sweeping royal robe

As soft as velvet, woven artfully
From skins of bats. A slender band of gold
Gleamed like a halo round his glossy hair.

He stood the type of peoples that would soon
Pass with the passing of their ancient world.
What legendary lore, what wild romance,
What strange traditions, what poetic strains
Of arms escutcheoned, swords and spears and plumes,
Of old gray palaces, red battle-fields,
Of love and hatred, joyance and despair,
Of triumph, conquest, and of ruin,—rose
To haunt his presence as he came to face
His base-born peasant captors on that night!

He gazed throughout the crowd my face to see;
For though he knew of my departure, still
He hoped that I had speedily returned,
To be his champion at that fateful hour.
His face with keenest disappointment fell
When his eye failed to mark me. "Tell me, pray,"
He whispered some one, "Where is he,—my friend,—
The Knight De Soto?" Then the answer came,
"Thy friend is far away; he returns not
For ten days, or a fortnight." Deep dismay
Darkened the visage of the fated king;
His heart, intrepid once, sank like a star
From the white zenith of exultant hope
To the black nadir of forlorn despair.
His glorious dreams of pomp and power restored,
And freedom in the midst of those he loved,
Lay like the wrecks of royal argosies
Scattered by storms along a desert shore.
Ah, had I only dreamed, unhappy king,

That awful night, that thou hadst need of me!
Upon thy craven foes I should have rushed,
And saved thy life, or perished at thy side.
But far away I wandered; dallying there,
I left thee to the mercy of those wolves,
Surrounded, and unshielded from thy doom!

A farce indeed that trial would have proved,
Had not the outcome been a tragedy.
No chance they left the king; a faithful few
Struggled to save him, but were brushed aside.
Pizarro, sitting as the council's head,
To Atahualpa spake: "I ask of thee,
Art guilty or not guilty? We await
Thine answer." Then the monarch slowly rose,
Replying: "I have answered thee before,
And now I answer thee again: No, no!
I have not slain my brother. I have not
Fomented discord. In my prison-cell,
Hemmed, caged and barred, suspected, spied upon,
Seeing friends rarely,—when hath been my chance
To plan a murder, or rouse a realm to war?
I bow before no idols; images
To me are only symbols; they but stand
As the faint shadows of the Unknown God.
But yet, my worthy captors, I deny
Your right to try me under any charge.
I am a king. Your king, alone, my peer,
May pass upon my cause. For none but princes
Of princes should be judges: else your law
Is only anarchy. Yet granting all
Your claims of royal jurisdiction, think
What favors have I done you! O, recall,
Ye Christians, how I took you to my bosom,

Bestowing every kindness on you! Think,
O think how, when I came on peace intent,
Ye slew my people, and threw me into chains!
'I was a stranger, and ye took me in';
So spake the Master whom ye quote to me:
Yea, ye were strangers, and I took you in:
See my reward! Enthrallment first, and now
Prospect of death! I bought my liberty;
I bought it as a man may buy his bread;
I heaped two cells with treasure,—treasure such
As never a king in all the world before
Offered his captors to be free again.
But still I clank my fetters, and I stand
By death confronted. Christians! Is it true
That Christ, your God, preached Love? Or did he
preach
A Gospel of the Torch and Sword? But no,
I beg not for Christ's mercy; I but ask
The justice that He sought at Pilate's hands,—
That Pilate, who, ye say, misjudged His cause,
And, therefore, groans to-night in flames of hell!"

He ended. Many seemed impressed; throughout
The council-chamber murmurs of applause
Stirred faintly. Then they sent the king away:
He having gone, far into the midnight hours
They held a stormy session. First uprose
Valverde. Hard, austere and accurate,
As cold and bloodless as a pair of scales,
Unto one standard ever sternly true,
He weighed with blank indifference rights and wrongs,
Gold like the brass, and silver like the lead.
From his thin colorless lips, though oily-toned,
Fell judgments harsh and pitiless. Then he:

"My friends, with deep regret I speak. Ye know
My holy calling bids me not stray
From paths of peace. No man of blood am I,
No trumpeter to arms; I go with you,
A harbinger of life, not death. But yet,
Christians, at times great exigencies rise,
When even men of God must bid the sword
Leap from the scabbard, and the keen-edged flame
Spring from the torch. I grant you, Christ taught
peace

And mercy; yet when sellers of the doves
And money-changers thronged in hordes profane
God's holy temple, He was moved to wrath,
And so He lashed them, howling, from that shrine.
Hearken, ye Christians! Have ye now forgot
This creature's blasphemies? Have ye forgot
How, when we first met him, he scoffed and sneered
At the word of God? Do ye recall, my friends,
How this man smote the Scriptures from my hand
Into the dust? Then, if ye have forgotten,
Beware, lest God forget you and your cause!
Shall this man beg for mercy from those lips,
Those same foul lips, that ridiculed God's Word?
If ye recall not how this infidel
Scoffed and blasphemed, then you, as well as he,
May fear the everlasting fires! O, friends,
There is a limit to God's mercy: so
A limit must there be, likewise, for men,
When mercy is but crime: we must be just,
Not piteous, to a wretch who jeers at God,—
Who long since passed the boundary where God's
love
Could yield forgiveness. But I speak no more
Of insult unto Heaven, and now enquire

Of this man's deeds toward his fellow-man.
He is a murderer! On this very night
His brother moulders in the damp, dark earth,
A modern Abel, by this modern Cain
Destroyed,—slain when a prisoner in the hands
Of hirelings of this despot. Prate ye still
Of mercy to a captive? Pitied he
His captive brother? He denies his guilt;
But who can doubt his creatures, at his hest,
Fell on the hapless victim? He hath said
We have no right to try him; that his cause
Should be adjudged alone by one who sits
His peer, upon a throne. I answer then,
This man, in truth, by right, is not a king:
He is a bastard: none have right to reign
Save those conceived in holy wedlock: thus
That pretext fails. So nothing now remains
When his fallacious pleas are all dismissed,
But punishment. What shall the sentence be?
I say,—if laws avail of God and man,
If still we dare to do our duty,—one,
And only one, just verdict can be given;
And that one verdict, men of Spain, is Death!"

He finished. Then a tumult of applause,
Loud, insolent and aggressive, followed. Long
The cheering and the clapping of the hands
Resounded. After silence fell once more,
The friends of Atahualpa timidly
Sat voiceless; each was waiting for the other
To break the spell, and cry aloud the Right.
Among these, Juan Pizarro glanced about,
Hoping in vain some champion would arise,
More learned, and expert in speech than he,

To lift the gauntlet. But when none appeared,
Shyly he rose himself. Speaking at first
But slowly, soon he kindled with his theme;
His placid eyes flashed fire, his splendid form
Rose towering, and his simple, quiet face
A noble epic dignity assumed.

Then he: "My friends, ye know my past; ye know
That never have I seen one day at school,
That never have I read one written line,
And never have I learned to pen a word.
I view with envy every barefoot boy
Who knows his letters; yea, I envy him
His long duress between the dingy walls
When barred from romp and play through field or
wood;

For though he longs for freedom, O much more
I long for knowledge and for wisdom lost
To me forever! I can even feel
Some envy for that blind man, who, in youth,
Ere sight was lost, could read the printed tome.
No longer can he view the earth or sky,
The leaf or blossom; yet his memory,
Aided by books, and converse with the wise,
Can recreate them into lovelier forms,
Kenning new glories with the spirit's eyes,—
Those eyes that never dim. But I can never
Know books, nor hold sweet converse with the wise.
True, I can still behold the heavenly hues
Of sunrise and of sunset, that the blind
Have lost; but yet their true significance,
Their inner meaning, to the wise revealed,
Are lost on me,—blind, blind from birth! So thus
I shrink from speech, when others here, well trained
And tutored, sit in silence. Yet speak out

I must! I shirk no duty on the field,
Nor will I shirk my duty here. My friends,
The voice of honor bids us free the King.
I know not if he wears his crown by right;
I only know our sacred word is pledged.
Yea, being so unlettered, all the more
Must I keep hallowed that one thing I have
In place of letters,—my unsullied faith.

“Say ye that Christ used force? To this I answer:
Christ was a God; but we are only men;
He was a sovereign; we are only subjects;
His was the right to punish, and not ours.

“Ye say the king is guilty; but I say
If he be guilty of his brother's death,
Yet we were guilty still for slaying him.
Can the red stain of one ensanguined crime
In bloodshed of another crime be washed
To whiteness? Yet again, though ye believe
The monarch guilty, I demand of you,
Why not commit him to our lord, the king?
Who dares assert the judgment of our prince
Would fail of justice? I, the least of all
Among the soldiery of Spain, am jealous
Of Spain's unsullied honor. Let this cause
Be laid before the throne; then, be ye sure,
Our Nation's arms will still be unassoiled.”

When thus he finished, some throughout the room
Applauded. But a vicious gust of jeers
And hisses, by Hernando led, soon swept
The timid voice of approbation down.
Almagro rose to speak; his one blind eye

Rolled with an ugly, evil restlessness;
The one unblinded glittered balefully;
The scar that slashed his cheek grew purpler still.
“Comrades,” he cried, “my words are few. I
 speak

Only of vital things. For fifty years
These hands have labored, yet without reward:
Though I am old, not even have I yet
Regained the outlays that I lost in youth.
If this man be released, you snatch away
My horn of plenty, when on Fortune’s arm
It lies extended for my grasp. Why harp
On pledges made by you,—pledges that I
Myself made not? With frankness let me speak:
I tell you that the issue we confront
Is, whether we shall spare this prisoner’s life,
Or save our own. Release him, and in less
Than one short sennight we shall find ourselves
Pursued by myriads of barbarians,
Bloodthirsty,—frantic for our lives: our doom,
A death by torture, nothing could avert
Save death by our own hands. If I had power
To save this man, yet hazard not ourselves,
Most gladly would I say, ‘Go free.’ But, friends,
As surely as we freed him, he would raise
A countless multitude to smite us all.
There is no question here of right or wrong:
The issue here is life or death for us,
Through life or death for him. When to one spar
Two shipwrecked sailors cling far out at sea,
And one discovers that his comrade’s weight
Will sink them both,—that only one can float
To safety on that spar,—who blames that man
Who flings the other off, to save himself,

When else both men would perish? Sons of Spain!
Save yourselves first; then prate of right or wrong."

As he concluded, there was heard the voice
Of Hernando, crying: "Let us have the vote!"
Then rising from his seat, that creature, worst
Of all Pizarro's clan, roared, "Let us vote!
Who cares to hear more speeches? They are fit
For gabbling beldames, toothless graybeards, not
For men who deal with men! The vote! the vote!"
Pizarro, seeing that his scheme would win,
Feigned a judicial calmness, waved his hand,
And curbed Hernando, who resumed his seat
In silence. Then with pharisaic drawl
And unctuous mouthing, he exposed at last,
Poorly disguised, his villainy of soul:
"Our covenant with the prisoner is not now
In question. We were pledged to set him free
On payment of a certain price: that price
He paid. On paying that, his right was clear
To freedom: granted. But we hold him not
For any old offence; since he hath paid
The ransom, new offences have been charged,
And these alone we now debate. No pledge
We made him hath been broken; seeing that,
We only ask: Is Atahualpa guilty
Of crimes committed since his ransom? Sirs,
For me, though on my brother's cause I sat,
Forced would I be, with sorrow, yea, with tears,
To say, 'The man is guilty; he must die.' "

He ceased, and louder grew the tumult; cries
Of "Vote, vote, vote!" hurtled with clamorous fury.
A vote was taken; with a brutish roar

The mob declared the charges proved. So then,
They doomed the king to perish at the stake,
And naught was left his faithful advocates
But vain remonstrance.

When the morning came,
Pizarro bore himself the frightful news
To Atahualpa, who in anguish cried,
"Alas! What have I done to merit this?
Why this terrific doom? Think of the stake,
The death by fire,—a death unspeakable!
And this thy gift, Pizarro! who hast wrung
Imperial riches from me,—who hast known
Nothing from me in all thy life but good!"
Then sighing, as though plunged in depths of woe,
Pizarro gushed with easy-flowing tears!

But still, indecent in his haste to strike
Ere my return, the second night to come
Was chosen by Pizarro as the time
To lead his victim to the stake. Then came
Valverde to the prisoner, and he said,
"Soften thy heart; bend thou thy stubborn neck;
Thy false religion openly renounce,
And our true faith profess. Do thou but this,
And I will save thee from the death by fire,
That fate horrific, and the strangler's hand
Shall make a death less frightful." "I will not!"
The victim cried: the priest persisted still,
And saw the captive waver, though he said
"No! no!" with passion. Long the Inca paused;
In hesitation oft he shook his head.
At length, to save himself from death by fire,
He yielded. So Valverde named him Juan,

In honor of that one who, long ago,
Baptized the blest Messiah; for upon
His day the hapless monarch sought repose
Within the bosom of our Church. On high
The priest upraised a chalice, wrought of gold,
And sparkling with precious jewels, that had once
In Atahualpa's regal banquet-halls
Glittered at glorious feasts: and from it now
The priest poured water on the Inca's head,
Proclaiming solemnly, "I baptize thee
In the name of the Father, and the Son,
And the Holy Spirit."

That eve, the King
Desired to see Pizarro, who, ere long,
Came to the prison. Said the Inca then,
"Pizarro, one last favor at thy hands
I beg: and surely that one favor thou
Wilt grant me, since thou owest unto me
All thy good fortune. They whose ships have
sailed
Around the world, and seen the East meet West,
Say that the sunset on one lonely shore
Reddens to joyful sunrise on another;
And so, Pizarro, under Fate's decree,
My sombre dusk hath been thy glorious dawn.
Hearken then, unto me. When I am dead,
I beg of thee to take my corse, and see
That it is carried back to Quito; there
Would I be buried with my fathers, not
Amongst unfriendly strangers in Peru,
Who scorned me and my mother." "Be it so,"
Pizarro answered: but a cobweb strand
Was not more fragile than his pledge of faith.

To what a depth had sunk the hapless King!
Yet in his lowly state his heart grew calm,
Knowing the worst had come. Humility
Is its own compensation: he who falls
In body, oft is lifted up in soul
To fellowship with heaven. Like the wretch
Cast into a deep and darksome pit, he sees
The stars at noon,—stars that the blinded eyes
Of those who thrust him there, may never see.

The last day came; at cockcrow, ere the dawn
Had flecked the East with gray, they roused the King;
The black-robed friars came: the sacrament
Of bread and wine, the body and the blood
Of Christ, Valverde's hand administered
To him who soon would tread earth's scenes no more.
Then, when in solemn tones the liturgy
Died to an awful hush, the King was led,
Blindfolded, bound, and garbed in deepest black,
Between two soldiers, stumbling along the way,
To the death-chamber. Thus it was that morn,
Condemned by base-born peasants, in he went
To face the horror of the strangler's chair.
There died the prince unfaltering, as became
The proud descendant of an hundred kings,
Celestial offspring of the Sun and Moon,
And by his doom the splendid arms of Spain
Were tarnished for all ages yet to come.

Pizarro, still ignoring every pledge,
Gave orders for a burial near the walls
Of Caxamalca. Pompous funeral rites
In an old palace (now become a church),
Were held above the victim. Then there came

Pizarro and Almagro and the rest,
As mourners at the funeral, clothed in black,
To prove their depth of sorrow for the dead.
None would have needed sombre drapery,
Could their black hearts have been exposed to view!

In rushed a throng of Atahualpa's wives
To throw themselves upon his corse; but soon,
Repulsed and driven from the church, they ran
With shrieks and screams back to the palace halls,
And slew themselves to join their perished lord.
The shadows of the royal banquet-room
Were lit with flashing daggers; piteous moans
And sobs of anguish quivered like the wails
Of wild November winds; fast-gushing blood
Flooded the golden floors in crimson. Then
The plaints grew lower, as the self-murderers
Died, one by one. Above that frightful waste
Of corpses wan, and writhing, shuddering forms
Of those yet living, strode the favorite queen
Of the dead monarch,—Amalissa, who
Against herself had not yet raised her arm.
Slender and tall and stately was she, rearing
With air imperial; yet her sparkling eyes
Showed madness; masses of her jetty hair
Tossed back in disarray; her naked feet
Were dabbled in her slaughtered comrades' blood.
As nimble as a serpent, up she climbed
Through graven golden fruitage on the wall,
To where a golden dragon from on high
Down glared with diamond eyes. Upon his crest
She reared in maniac triumph, thrilled with rage
For self-destruction. Inaccessible
To hands of friends or chains of enemies,

There on that giddy eminence she stood,
And raved infuriate. She had borne aloft
A harp with some strings broken, some as yet
Unshattered. Then she jangled through the wires,
And fired with bardic flame, in shrilly tones
Part shouted and part sang the suttee's hymn,
Defiant of the gathering Spanish throng:

"I shall come, my prince, my bridegroom,
I shall come, my love, my lord,
Despite of the wan-faced Christians
Agape in a startled horde!
I am avid to join thee, comrade,
In thy dungeon there in the night,
For Light without thee is Darkness,
And Darkness with thee is Light.

"Ye pale, ye passionless Christians,
Ye never can understand;
For your errant loves are changeful
As the skies of your northern land:
Your grief is only grief's shadow,
That flitteth and fleeth away:
The blood in your veins but water,
Your hearts are but lumps of clay.

"When under the heliotropes lieth
The heart that your vows had won,
You hasten to choose another,—
The dear old story is done!
With another love is forgotten
The love that was once so sweet,—
Forsaken, to lie in the grasses,
With a stone at head and feet!

"But we of the fervid Southland
Are loyal despite the grave,
Still true to the dear dead sleeper
Where the cypress branches wave.
Our love hath no feeble twilight,
No pitiful wane of the moon;
It dies in a dazzle of morning,
Or the white-hot glow of the noon.

"For that which the lord hath honored
No other should clasp or claim;
The lips that to one were caressful
Meet others only in shame.
There is only one true passion
In deserts of life accurst
That is sweet and true and sacred,
And that One Love is the First.

"O sweet First Love of the dawning,
O sweet First Love of the dew,
The glamour, the bliss, the glory
Depart forever with you!
The overblown rose should shatter;
The overblown love should die
Before it wrinkles and withers
Beneath an unfriendly sky.

"Away with your Northland matings
That end with the loved one's breath!
Away with the heart neglectful
Of its comrade cold in death!
Away with the docile passion
That changes to suit the will,
Consoled with an old-age spousal
For the First Love's poignant thrill!

"O, would that this clod-formed body,
Like the spirit, could flit away,
And, painless, in air evanish,
Escaping from foul decay!
But the pangs of death must rend me
Before I can reach thy side;
I must know the dens of darkness
To rejoin thee as thy bride.

"I shall never bear an usurper
Embosomed in place of thee;
I shall keep our tryst, my sovran,
Beyond the uncharted sea!
Unurned, uncrowned, and unsandaled,
With bleeding hands that are numb,
I grope my way through the shadows:
O Bridegroom, I come, I come!"

The maddened strain surceased. The harp's last string
Had snapped to silence. With a scream she sprang
Down from the dragon's dizzy perch, and fell
A lifeless, mangled heap, among the stones.

Meanwhile, throughout the Southern realms, I probed
Into the evil rumors that assailed
The honor of the Inca. I had striven
All the more ardently to save the king,
Since he had trusted me with such strong faith,
And loudly praised my little friendly deeds
So far beyond my just deserts: for, sire,
Unto the just man, praise unmerited
Stings deeper than rebuke.

My labors done,
When I returned and heard the shocking tale,

Within my heart amazement, grief and wrath
Battled for mastery; my soul seemed wrecked
In a wild, hopeless chaos. Hastily
I sought Pizarro,³³ and I found him, garbed
In midnight mourning, aping airs of woe.
A huge sombrero slouched upon his head,
And well-nigh hid his face. His furtive eyes
Were red from rubbing at theatric tears.
"O, base-born monster!" I exclaimed, "I see
Once more thy lies have cloaked thy base designs.
Accept my challenge,—no, thou wilt not fight,
And I would smirch myself to touch thee, wretch!
How avarice debases thee! For gold,
Thou stoapest unto murder, and for gold
Thou wouldst forswear thy hopes of heaven! But
think,

Think, man, how soon its little benefits
Will all be ended: when thy sun shall set,
Thou wilt but need two paltry copper coins,
Only two coins of copper,—to weigh down
Thy pulseless eyelids over thy staring eyes."
For once, the miscreant, with his guilt revealed,
Lost all his bland composure, and his cheeks
Reddened and paled by turns, though he dared
not

Answer defiantly. After a pause,
Taking his long brown beard between his teeth,
He bit it, as a captured rattlesnake
May bite its own dread rattles to appease
Its rabid, helpless fury. Then he flung
Away the hairy mouthful, and by force
Choking and strangling down his dastard rage,
He swore, "The others are to blame, not I;
I sought to save him,—thou misjudgest me."

Almagro and Valverde next appeared
With others, at the very point of time
When, by their chieftain, each was being named
As a ringleader in the crime. Enraged,
Quickly these others answered him, in turn
Accusing the accuser loudly. "What!"
Exclaimed Almagro, "dost thou say I led
The others in that trial? It is false!
Why, thou didst lead; we only followed." "No,"
Retorted then Valverde, "both of you
Were urgent for his condemnation: I
But voted for his death regretfully:
If there be blame, then both of you should bear it."
So thus they bickered and they wrangled; each
Proved all his fellows guilty. Vexed to hear,
No longer would I listen; so I left,
Ashamed to own such creatures men of Spain.

BOOK XII

De Soto's Narrative continued—The Conquest of Peru—The march to Cuzco—Battle in the river at Xauxa—Pizarro seizes Challcuchima, a Peruvian nobleman, and condemns him to death—The nobleman's controversy with Valverde—He refuses to renounce his religion—His death at the stake—De Soto's march over the mountains—The battle of Vilcacongá—Narrow escape of the Spaniards—Crossing the river on its osier bridge—De Soto's life in danger through rashness—Adalinda, the young Peruvian nobleman—He joins De Soto's troop—Fall of Cuzco—Immense treasures found in palaces and temples and tombs—Gold and silver become cheap and commonplace—De Soto's troops have their horses shod in silver—Vast treasures lost and won in gaming.

THE Inca fallen through such treachery,
I half resolved to sheathe my sword forever.
But in this crisis, when my lord, the king,
Demanded faithful service at my hands,
And the arms of Spain, beset by enemies,
Stood in dire need of every loyal soul,
I deemed it best these wrongs to overlook
Till Cuzco should be taken, and the struggle
Be ended for all time in victory.

So, joining all our bands, the final march
To Cuzco was begun. Facing the south,
For three days through a lofty mountain range,
Rocky and barren, and enwrapped in clouds,

Slowly we plodded, till at length we saw
The temples and the courts of Xauxa rise
Beyond a river. With torrential force,
Deep-swollen from the melting mountain snows,
The stream had overflown, torn down its bridge,
And raging in a foam-strewn, icy flood,
Seemed hoarsely shouting, "Come no further!"

Throngs

Of natives, crowded on the strand beyond,
Defiant, yelled, "Ye bandits of the North,
We dare you to cross over!" They dreamed not
That men of Spain were dowed with hardihood
To make them brave that torrent: but in truth
Their challenge roused mine ardor: so I cried,
"Come on, my lads, and fear not!" and I plunged
Down with my courser in the chilly waves.³⁴
The rest came after, wildly cheering; soon
An hundred horsemen struggled in the flood,
Which surged and thundered like a cataract,
Hurled billows in our faces, dashed in spray
Upon our eyes and mouths, roared in our ears,
Blinding and strangling and deafening us. Then,
After a mighty effort, drenched, half-drowned,
Chilled and a-shiver, up we climbed the slope
In safety on the other marge. The crowds
That first had mocked us, sped their arrows fast,
And rushed upon us, brandishing their spears
To drive us backward. But with hearty shouts
We galloped on them, smiting manfully,
And soon they scattered in a frenzied rout,
Leaving their trampled comrades on the field.

We entered Xauxa: here our soldiers found
Such riches, that the dazzling treasures

Of all the cities we had trod before
Seemed haunts of penury. The splendid fanes,
With argent vessels and with shrines of gold,
The palaces, with jeweled ornaments,
And royal tombs, concealing priceless gems,
Afforded glorious pillage, such as never
The conquered emperors of Cathay or Ind
Yielded to Jenghis or to Tamerlane.

To wield a strong hand unrestrained by others,
Pizarro sent me forward with the van
Upon the road to Cuzco. The next day
Almagro followed with a larger force.
The despot left alone, his evil plans
Soon bore their bitter fruit. Within that town
There dwelt a high Peruvian nobleman
Named Challcuchima, who in wealth and power
Surpassed all others. Hoping through this man
To subjugate the province, and to crush
All armed rebellion at his yoke, the tyrant,
Seizing the noble, threw him into chains.
Going to see the captive in his cell,
He thundered, "Thou shalt stand accountable
For all resistance to the Spanish host;
Know then, that if thy treacherous countrymen
Remain in arms, I doom thee to the stake.
Beware." The prisoner, towering haughtily,
Like the bronze image of some warlike god
At his forefathers' altars, answered him,
"I frame no laws to rule my countrymen:
I ordered none to make an appeal to arms;
I will demand of none to lay them down."
"Then thou shalt perish in the flames!" declared
His captor. "Be it so," rejoined the other;

"The Gods be praised, whatever evil power
Is yielded to the wicked, they can never
Keep us from dying!"

With his wonted zeal,
The priest Valverde came to see the peer
Before the faggots had been lit: and then
He cried, "Turn from false creeds thy sires professed,
And seek thy dying solace in our faith."
Sternly the noble answered, "I have found
No fruitage hanging from thy tree of faith
Save lust and greed, and craft and cruelty.
Thou pratest of a creed of Love and Good,
Truth, and Forgiveness of thine Enemies;
God grant that thou and thine be not of those
Who truly mirror forth its noble aims!"
"Thou infidel!" Valverde cried, "thy scoffs
Cry out for retribution: in these flames
Soon shalt thou writhe; but this dire punishment
Shall be a joy compared with the agonies
Awaiting thee in everlasting fires."
"Misguided creature," said the peer, "thy clan,
True to its ancient instincts, ever seeks
Delight in taking sides against mankind,
Its comrades, brethren,—its own flesh and blood,—
In favor of some god it never knew.
Heaven needs no vindication at thy hands;
But man does need thy sympathy and aid;
Then let him have it, wasting not thy time
Prejudging causes set for higher courts.
God is a father: is a father pleased
To cast his children into endless flames?
Slander Him not; thine own malicious heart,
And not His gracious mandate, hath decreed

These torments here, and in the world to come.
Thou joyest in the thought that He will be
Thy tool for vengeance; that thy hated foe
His hand shall prison in eternal night;
Delicious morsel! Yet believe not, man,
That He who rules the stars will lend Himself
To aid thy petty malice. You but forge
The Father's name, in lightly thus condemning
To endless pangs earth's trembling multitudes.
Go, scare the children with thy threats of hell;
Thy hoofs and horns of devils fright me not:
No man a hell deserves, save he whose hate
Conceives it, and reserves it for his foes."

Furious, they bound him to the stake; the fires
Rose with their torments, but he wavered not;
Then Death, more gracious than Pizarro, came;
But ere the smoke and flames had hushed his
voice,
They heard him calling on his fathers' God,—
Him, who created and preserves the world.

Meanwhile, with scarcely sixty men, I climbed
Through bleak sierras high among the clouds.
Black, shaggy and abhorrent, rock on rock,
Spread wilds chaotic, yet magnificent;
Great cordilleras lifted to the skies
In terror, beauty and sublimity.
Vast glaciers dazzled blindingly above;
Beneath were bowery vales and green champaigns;
Oft would perpetual Winter trail his snows
About undying Summer's verdant fields,
Like some hoar patriarch, with a white-robed arm
Thrown round a lovely daughter at his feet.

Steep galleries, hewn from living rock, swung round
The dizzy ramparts of colossal crags.
Refusing to be driven up the steps,
Our chargers, snorting, shied and balked in fear,
But chided, spurred and booted oftentimes,
They started on their pathway to the heights,
Panting and groaning, stumbling blindly on
In anguish and dismay. Looking above,
We saw the pass of Vilcacongá rear
Its spiral stairways round and round on high,
And gazing up that giddy circling path,
Our heads swam, and our senses reeled and whirled,
The earth swooned, and we staggered as it swayed.
Could we go further? Could we force our steeds
Up such a fearful steep to pick their way?

Then in a moment, on the cliffs above
A multitude of savages we spied
Fringed round the ledges; thousands came to view,
And yelling, cast upon us jagged rocks,
That thundered with destruction in their path.
Whizzing, great pebbles from their slings flew by,
As swift as bullets from a pistol. Then
I bade my men take steady aim, and fire;
Their muskets blazed; with frightful cracks and
 roars

They hurled defiance at the pagan throngs.
Then every cliff and crag and pinnacle
Among the mountains shouted in reply;
Then echo answered echo, crash on crash:
It seemed that all the giants of the world
Had stormed the battlemented heights of heaven
With cannonade of earthquake and of storm,
And roused the wrath of the everlasting gods.

Soon many a savage toppled from the verge;
The others, overcome with sudden fear,
Shrank into hiding. But from days of old
Versed in the ways of mountaineers, I knew
That they would quickly rally, and espying
Our little band beneath them still, would seek
To crush us under another rockp storm.
I saw, beyond the stairway, perched aloft,
A long and level tract of ground; if once
That high plateau were reached, our lives were
safe!

But would our horses climb that fearful stair?
Then glancing round, my heart was overjoyed
To note that many a barb, inured to war,
Had lost his fears, and neighed in exultation,
Roused by the martial roll of musketry.
So now I patted on his neck my steed,
And whispered him caressingly. At once
He speeded like an arrow from its bow,
And all the other steeds, alike inspired,
Came following after. But at every inch
The Indians fought us up that dreadful height
Like furies fighting souls that strive for heaven.
They clutched the horses' limbs, and clinging, sought
To drag down steed and rider; at their hands
A score of chargers perished on the steps,
While others lost their footing, stumbled, fell,
And pitching over the granite mountain-walls,
By horrent crags, from precipice to pit,
Were crushed to atoms half a league below.
Barbarians by the multitude we smote,
Though hardly one man, or one steed, in all
Our band escaped unhurt. But by and by,
Rejoiced, we thanked God with a mighty shout

For climbing to the summit of those stairs,
And standing once more on the level ground.

Night then was falling; so the mountaineers
Fell back a bow-shot's distance; well I knew
Another wild attack would come at dawn.
But now we bivouacked on strategic ground,
And though my force was well-nigh cut to half,
What man could hesitate in doubt or fear
Since winning in that struggle up the stair?

That night we slumbered not: from hour to hour
Voices of warriors speaking on each side
Plainly were heard within the ranks opposed.
Gathering my cavaliers, "Pray unto God,"
I told them; "Yet beseech not childishly
That heaven may save you by a miracle,
But pray for strength, for courage and for skill
In your own selves, to save yourselves like men."
Their souls with ardor burning, all the host
Of brave men cheered me lustily.

With haste

We now prepared defences. In an hour
The dead and wounded steeds in front were strewn
To make us breastworks; every soldier crouched
Behind that wall of flesh: clutched in his hands,
A leveled musket with its deadly charge
Waited to flash destruction on the foe.

So morning broke; at last the onset came;
We withered the hostile ranks with rapid fire,
Though many savages, untouched, rushed on,
Shrieking, and hurling their spears. But now hark!

We hear a trumpet's blare,—O strain divine,
Thrilling our giddy ears with ravishment!
And now appear Almagro and his men,
Two hundred strong; so with a joyous cheer,
We sally forth, and charge the paynim host.
Again the mountains tremble with the crash
Of human thunderbolts; again their shades
Are lit with lightnings from the hands of men.
Before those dreadful arms, the savage might
Of the long dusky lines of mountaineers
Shriveled and crumbled. But, as if the gods
Worshiped of old upon those heights, enraged
To see their votaries falling, had thrown out
A dusky shield to save the remnant throng,
A dense gray mist swept on us from above,
And like a vast cloak wrapped us round and round,
Hiding the foe, and ending all pursuit.

Though I should live from weary age to age,
And plod as hoary as the Wandering Jew,
To the end of all my heart would quake and heave,
Remembering Vilcaonga's frightful stairs,
Where Death and I encountered, face to face!

We reached a river; hearing shouts behind,
We turned, and saw Pizarro coming. Here
We counseled all together, ere we dared
The crossing: for we saw an osier bridge
Whose thread-like cables swung from side to side
Whenever a foot would touch it: every steed,
Snorting and trembling, with dilated eyes
And pricked-up ears, drew back in piteous terror,
Not daring to attempt it. But I spurred
My courser onward, though he pitched and reared

And plunged. Backward and forward swung and
swayed

The fragile network, like a wind-swept bough.
Yet, though I feared to see the cables snap,
Their slender strands might have upheld with ease
The camels and the lordly elephants
Of a Numidian caravan. So now,
When I had safely crossed, slowly the rest
Came following; then, within a little while,
The very faintest of the faint in heart,
Trusting the bridge, attained the shores beyond.

Vain of this feat, and thrilled with ecstasy
To know that Cuzco now was near at hand,
I waited not for others tottering over,
But galloped far ahead of all the troop.
Then, suddenly, from out a wild ravine,
Upsprang a legion of Peruvians,
Waving their lances, clubs and javelins,
And wildly shouting; ere I drew my breath,
A throng of warriors had surrounded me.
Dazed and confounded, I first paused a little,
But then perceiving that my life itself
Hung in suspense on momentary skill,
I fell upon them like a tusky boar,
And cutting here, and cleaving there, I felled
Three leaders of their band. How I deplored
My own foolhardy recklessness! For now,
When the glad ending of my toils was near,
And now when jealous Fortune, who so long
Had kept me waiting, tendered me her crown,
It seemed that rashness had destroyed me. So,
As some strong mariner,—his journey done,—
Returning on a voyage from afar,

Is wrecked and drowned on rocks before his home,—
Now I seemed lost in sight of victory.
My horse was pierced with arrows; through the steel
That mailed me, battle-axes gashed my limbs,
Till saddle, horse, and man and armor reddened
With swiftly-running rivulets of blood.
But soon I sped against their bristled ranks
With more insistent ardor than before,
And then, amazed, I saw them falling back.
The reason for this wavering soon was known;
For here a young Peruvian nobleman
Approached. His burnished golden helmet rose
With many-colored nodding plumes: his shield,
Argent and azure, carved with curious forms
Of serpent and of dragon wreathed in fight,
Shone forth resplendent. Overstrewn with pearls,
His visor lifted; from beneath it peered
A winsome face of youthful beauty, yet
One that was nobly masculine; his grace
And princely bearing breathed of chivalry,
And all sweet attributes of gentle birth.
Then he: "O warrior, I have seen thee strive,
And seeing, know thee favored of the gods;
I stand against thine arms no more, but haste
To render homage, and become thy liege.
Thou needest not my sword disdain, for I
Am Adalinda, son of Azacor;
The names of both the sire and son are known
From peasant huts to kingly halls." Thereat,
He with his forces joined us: now the path
To Cuzco lay resistless to our march.

At evenfall the Royal City spread
Its domes and walls beneath our ravished eyes.

Ah! there it lay, white, set in green champaigns,
The City of my fancy and my dreams.
And there, audacious, flushed in triumph, stood
Almagro, and Pizarro with his brothers,
Like ravenous eagles on a mountain crag,
Who spy far down a timid flock of quails,
And whet their beaks to pounce upon the prey.

That night we passed in camp on hills above,
Prepared to enter Cuzco at the dawn.
Soon came that fatal glimmer in the east.
Day, like Delilah, radiant, flushed with youth,
Took Night, her swarthy Samson, in her arms,
And having shorn his cloudy ebon locks,
Struck blind her lover with her glorious charms,
And hurled him from her bosom to his doom.
So Spain had come to far Peruvian shores;
The empire of the Incas was no more.

A splendid city, spotless-white, we found,
With marble mansions reared in verdant plots,
Like swans afloat on pools of emerald green.
Vast riches here were ours;³⁵ these later spoils
Transcended gorgeous Caxamalca's wealth,
And even that of glorious Xauxa. Soon
The Temple of the Sun was stripped of all
The gold and silver yet unplundered there.
Forth from the palace of one nobleman
Ten silver bars, a score of feet in length—
Each heavier than a giant's arm could lift—
Were dragged to light: from kindred palaces
Came splendid jewels, set most artfully.
But in the tombs lay treasures paramount
In splendor, and all dwellings of the dead

Ere long were plundered by rapacious hands.
Four golden llamas, of that creature's size,
In sepulchres were found: and there were seized
Bright sandals, dresses wrought of glistening beads,
And great funereal urns—all purest gold.
Twelve images of maidens were discovered,
Tall, stately as the daughters of a king,
Six formed of silver, six of virgin gold,
And wrought so lovingly by artful hands,
One paused to see the argent bosom heave,
The silvern lips part like a pallid rose,
While golden cheeks would blush, incarnadined.
There were discovered bleaching skeletons
With zones of brilliants, bracelets set with pearls,
While rubies, crimson as the planet Mars,
Like flaming eyes glared from the empty skull.
The bride and bridegroom, stricken in their joy,
Sate here together, mouldering in the gloom,
An emerald necklace falling to her breast,
A coronet of sapphires on his brow.

My share of spoil outdazzled all the dreams
My boyish heart had ever dared conceive.
Even lackeys and postillions hoarded wealth.³⁶
So, precious metals, commonplace and cheap,
Seemed rubbish in our hands: where now their charms,
That once had made us breast the flood and flame,
Pawn life and limb, and murder faith and truth?
Wealth we possessed, and yet we stood in need.
A loaf of bread would buy a silver cup;
A glass of wine would fetch a golden ring:
A sheet of writing-paper brought its size
Of hammered gold-leaf, and a pair of gloves
Was bartered for a grandee's silver shield.

Gold sandals were exchanged for leather shoes;
A horse was well-nigh worth a royal mint,
And all our wealth could not have bought a cow.
We had no iron; so our steeds were shod
In silver wrenched from fanes and palaces.³⁷

As freezing Winter's iron-sceptred sway
Keeps dormant all the serpents that in Spring
Crawl forth revived,—thus chill Adversity
Keeps dormant in the secret breast of man
Sins, that in sunny days of wealth and ease
Creep forth to plague the world. So now we saw,
As our men gorged on fruits of robbery,
Evils within their hearts unguessed before.
From these awaking evils not alone
Came ills to others, for the mischief-makers
Themselves were brought to misery. And, in truth,
Ill-gotten gains are ever thrown away,
Bringing no benefit to those who take,
But squandered as soon as stolen, in carouse
With dice or wine or harlot, they allure
Their spendthrift to his ruin. On the spoils
Of theft and murder, soldiers now began
To gamble feverishly. Great fortunes hung
In balance on one card; and riches fell
At falling of one die from reckless hands.
A trooper who had taken as his share
The Temple's golden image of the Sun,
Lost it in gaming through a single night;
And hence that adage of the Spanish tongue,
"Ere sunrise comes he plays away the Sun."

BOOK XIII

De Soto's Narrative continued—The Conquest of Peru—De Soto sees Pizarro, and relinquishes his post—Fate of the conquerors of Peru—The natives lay siege to Cuzco—Death of Juan Pizarro—Almagro's expedition to Chili—Great sufferings among his troops—He returns North, seizes Cuzco, and begins a war with the Pizarros—He takes Hernando and Gonzalo prisoners—Orgoñez, Almagro's lieutenant—His frequent remonstrances with his leader—Espinosa comes to parley with Almagro—His sudden death—Gonzalo makes his escape—Almagro, after receiving treacherous promises from Hernando, frees him—The Pizarros then begin war on Almagro again—Battle between Almagro and the Pizarros, wherein Orgoñez is slain—Almagro is taken prisoner—Hernando refuses him mercy—Alvarado unsuccessfully intercedes in his behalf—Alvarado visits Almagro in prison—Almagro writes his will—He is then strangled—Alvarado goes to Spain, and makes charges against Hernando—Hernando also returns to Spain, to face the charges—Sudden death of Alvarado—Hernando is then thrown into prison—A plot is formed to assassinate Pizarro—The leader of the conspirators, Juan de Rada—Death of Pizarro, his brother Francisco, and two pages, at the hands of the conspirators—Valverde and Velasquez are massacred by savages—Gonzalo becomes dictator over all Peru—The younger Almagro is beheaded through his orders—He begins a rebellion against the Spanish King—Gasca, the priest, is sent with an army to quell his insurrection—Gonzalo's troops desert him, and he is forced to surrender to Gasca—He is condemned to death—He adorns himself richly, and addresses the throng of people who have come to see him die—He is then beheaded, and is buried with the two Almagros, father and son.

SO now my duty to my king was done.
I saw Pizarro, and the post I held
Gladly surrendered. Yet a score of moons

Budded and bloomed and faded from the heavens
Before I trod through boyhood scenes again.

And now, great Chief, naught lingers to relate
Of these unhallowed struggles, save the account
Of righteous retributions that befell
Those whose incitements caused them. As one reads
The pages of that dreadful chronicle,
He shudders: yet a moral ends it all.
Had Atahualpa prayed to all his gods
For vengeance on the heads of all his foes,
And had those gods his supplications heard,
No juster and no surer punishment
Had ever overtaken one and all
Than that which claimed them, one and all, at last.
As every river gains the sea, though oft
By long and devious windings, so in time
God's justice, though it oft may deviate
And wander from the shorter path, attains
Its bourn of truth and right. This, all who hear
The end of these dark annals, must perceive.

Juan, best of all, was first of all to go,
And Fate was kind in beckoning him away
From fronting vengeful horrors still unborn.
A vast Peruvian host besieged Cuzco
With ten-score thousand braves; like gloomy clouds
Their legions blackened all the neighboring hills.
Down from those heights, upon the roofs below
Hot stones their engines flung, and flaming darts,
Setting the town afire. So ravenous flames
Devoured the temples and the palaces.
The smoke ascended in a murky pall,
Making the sun a globe of blood by day,

The moon a globe of ashes in the night.
Oft from those summits of surrounding hills
The savages rolled down the gory heads
Of gallant Spanish knights, whose errant feet
Beyond the city walls had strayed. Juan led
A sortie from the town: without the gates,
Great lassoes at his lines the Indians swung,
Dragging the steed and cavalier to death.
And now, as if the instruments of doom
Once in the white man's hands, were soon to be
His means of downfall, on the field appeared
The brown men riding steeds, and bearing arms
That thundered deadly volleys: steeds and arms
They had now captured, and on those who once
Had used them with such unrelenting power,
They turned them, as in realms of despotry
Rebellious leaders arm ferocious slaves,
And turn them on their sometime lords. At length
Juan scattered them in flight: the citadel,
Then in the rebels' hands, he next resolved
To take by storm; so, shouting to his men,
Far up the steepy height the way he led.

An arrow pierced his cheek: to ease the pain,
He loosed his helmet's buckle, and ere long
Rashly he threw the helmet from his head.
They reached the fortress; from its battlements
Down swept a storm of stones and javelins,
Smiting Castilians by the multitude.
Still Juan with valorous cheers led on his lads:
They scaled the walls; but as the pagans fled,
A giant savage, lingering sullenly,
Seized a great rock with monstrous hairy hands;
The jagged stone with all his might he hurled;

It whistled through the air, and furiously
Struck the brave leader's brow; the fearful blow
Felled him to earth; blood gushed in torrents; dust
Blinded his eyes: yet staggering to his feet,
He hailed his comrades on their victory.
But soon they bore him, fainting, from the field.
A few dull days he lingered, as his eyes
Slowly grew dimmer, and his whispers lower,
And his breath feebler. Then with kindly hand
Death came to ease him of his agonies.

Juan! I would lay this tribute on thy bier:
Amongst the cruel thou alone wert kind,
Amongst the treacherous thou alone wert true.
Irradiating good around, thy soul
Shone like a candle in a charnel's gloom.
Amongst thy selfish comrades, wolfish kin,
And evil prompters, thou wert as a spring
Found in a desert parched and blossomless.
Unlettered wert thou, yet of lofty soul,
Though base-born, yet a prince! On that great sea,
Where thou art voyaging to strands unknown,
God guide thee to a brighter, better world,
A higher life, a nobler destiny!

Almagro next was signaled to his doom.
A royal charter named him governor
Of all the land of Chili; but no man
The boundaries of that province might declare,
Its outposts or its ends. So to explore
And conquer this untracked, uncharted realm,
The gray adventurer led his war-worn troops.
But never in their wanderings over earth,
Nor on the sea, encountering savage wilds,

Or storms of heaven, or barbaric foes,
Had he or any knight in all his host
Such horrors as befell them now, endured.
Through heights of everlasting snows they climbed,
Where horse and rider sank and froze together;
They starved like gaunt-ribbed jackals; when their
steeds

Fell dead from cold, choking, they gormandized
Upon that flesh unclean: turned cannibal,
The Indian slaves, when their own comrades died,
Devoured them greedily. Close overhead
Black condors gathered in a sweeping cloud
To batten,—but the human vultures gorged,
And left to condors nothing save the bones.

To wrest dominion from the savages
They sought in vain: disasters and defeats
Their arms encountered everywhere. And now
The soldiers murmured: "From this realm accurst,
Let us return before it be too late.
This land is but a waste of snow and ice;
Here we shall only find a grave. In truth,
The royal charter gave us northern realms,
With Cuzco and its golden provinces.
Pizarro holds them wrongfully: why not
March north again, and wrest them from his hand?"
No man, indeed, could fix the uncertain lines
Bounding Almagro's or Pizarro's grounds,
And so the leader hearkened readily
To those who urged him leave these wintry lands
For climes more genial. But he lent an ear
To this advice more quickly, since his son,
Diego, his one child of love, might thus
Be favored.

In the far-off yester-years,
When first Almagro with the Spanish host
Marched through the wilds of Darien, he had fought
A bloody battle with a savage chief,
Who, after all his warriors had been slain,
Perished himself, defiant. That same day,
Hiding among the ruins of the lodge
Where once the chief abode, some troopers found
His daughter, and they dragged her forth, to be
The victim of their lust. Hearing her cries,
Almagro rushed upon the scene, and soon,
Beating and pounding manfully, he drove
The wolfish pack away. The damsel clasped
His knees in terror, and with piteous cries
Begged his protection. She was beautiful,
Sweet in her face and speech, and young indeed,
Her childhood barely past. He took the girl,
Yet doomed her not to slavery, and thrust not
Himself upon her. But though free, her heart
Learned in its own wild, simple way to love
Her captor. Like a pure and limpid lake
Set in a vale of ever-youthful Spring,
That mirrors in its hyacinthine bosom
An ancient snow-clad peak, now draped in clouds,
Now lit with sunlight, flushed with rosy dawn,
Or dim in pensive twilight, so this maid,
The sweet young daughter of the wilderness,
Gazed on and mirrored in her own soft breast
Her homely lover, worn and gray with years,
Changing her mood with his, to sun or storm,
To glowing dawn or melancholy dusk.

Thus then it was the damsel bore a son
To be his pride and hers. But the years went,

And she who with her winsome girlish charms
Had warmed the old man's bosom, passed away.
The son she left, a beauteous gallant youth,—
The fruit of unforgotten bygone joys,—
Her dark brown eyes, her slender hands and feet,
Her glossy hair, and her glad smiling mouth
Inherited. So when the mother died,
The father's love for both were merged in one,—
Diego, thus become the polar-star
Of all the old man's dreams. "May not my lad,"
He asked himself, "in time succeed to all
Pizarro's lands and mine?" And now he looked
To see his fondest hopes bear flower and fruit,
Daring to picture all Peru bowed down
Before his own Diego as its lord.

So they returned, athwart the desert waste
Of Atacama, through an hundred leagues
Of arid rocks in barren, burning wilds.
Here dread siroccos sucked and swirled the dust;
Sand-whirlwinds convoluted to the skies;
White plains reflected flaming skies of noon
With a dazzling, blinding glare; and blistering stones
Shifted their torments unto blistering feet.
At length the wanderers stood at Cuzco's walls:
Haggard and gray, a piteous sight they made,
With sunburned limbs, disheveled hair and beard,
With garments torn to shreds, or on their backs
Skins of wild-beasts, and armor red with rust.

So then Almagro and his grisly throng
Laid claim to Cuzco and the provinces
Lying anear its walls. Throughout those days,
Pizarro in the distant north sojourned,

Founding the city Lima, that he hoped
Henceforth to make the land's metropolis,
And being far from Cuzco, he had set
Hernando and Gonzalo in command
Of the imperial city in his stead.
These brothers of the tyrant in hot haste
Sought out Almagro at his camp. Enraged,
His new demands they heard; but craftily
They parleyed with him for a little space,
And left with smiles. Thenceforth, from day to day
They parleyed still, but ever begged for time,
Fast in the meantime adding to their troops,
Drilling in secret, and strengthening forts and walls.
Almagro, marking this, delayed no more,
But in the depths of night marched through the gates,
And seized the citadel. His soldiers found
The brothers in one mansion lodged together.
Orgoñez was the leader of the band
Sent out to find the brothers. Though he knocked
Sturdily upon the door, it stood fast-barred
Against him. Still he smote and kicked the door,
Whereat a casement opened overhead,
And both Hernando and Gonzalo peeped
Down on the throng below. "Come out, come out!"
Orgoñez cried; "Ye are my prisoners;
Come and surrender!" "But sirs, who are you?"
Gonzalo asked. "We are Almagro's men,
And we have come to take you. Open the door,
And yield yourselves!" the other yelled. At this,
Hernando left the casement, and Gonzalo
Briskly retorted, "Take us if you can!
We will not yield our swords to renegades!"
Orgoñez sought to force the door, but found
Its massive frame and its great bar too strong

Even for his own strong hands and feet. So then,
"Bring torches! Set the house afire!" he cried.
Torches were brought, and soon keen-pointed flames
Quivered and gleamed like venomous serpent-tongues,
Licking their courses up the walls. Ere long,
The house was ringed with fire. Great blazes climbed
To the high roof, and slowly gathering strength,
Fluttered aloft their red victorious flags.
The sky above grew black: the timid stars
Trembled, and dimmed, and faded out of sight,
While sparks in dazzling myriads whirled and swirled,
And eddied upward in a glittering throng,
As though the earth with storms of meteors
Bombarded heaven. Fleeing that fiery death,
Hernando and Gonzalo flung the door
Ajar, and dashing out, they sought to run
A race for freedom. But Orgoñez stood
Beside the doorway. As the brothers came
Rushing for liberty, one man he seized
With his right arm, and with his left the other.
Thus caught and gripped and pinioned suddenly
By their strong foe, the prisoners stumbled and fell
Flat on the earth, dragging their captor down
Between them. Then the other soldiers ran
Swiftly to aid Orgoñez, and behold!
Both brothers were held fast in manacles.
Scarce were they safely shackled, when the roof
Groaned on its blazing rafters, bent and swayed,
And then in flaming ruins thundered down.

A sturdy lad Orgoñez was, and true,—
Courageous as a lusty cockerel
With ruddy crest and red and golden plumes
Stalking in pomp and crowing lustily,

Lord of the harem of his mild-eyed hens.
He begged Almagro to condemn to death
Both brothers instantly. "Spare not," he cried,
"For dead men never bite."³⁸ His leader frowned,
Reflected, hesitated, and at last
Replied, "Orgoñez, they are old-time friends;
I have not heart to do this; urge it not."
"Sir," said Orgoñez, "all the men we see
Around us in this life we may divide
Into two classes,—those who lift us up,
And those who drag us down. This godless pair
Belongs to those who drag us down. And yet
You hazard your own safety and your friends'
To save their lives. It is your duty, sir,
To render justice to yourself and friends
Ere yielding mercy to your enemies."
But still Almagro hardened not his heart
Against the two Pizarros. Though still others
Begged and beseeched him ever to beware
Of lightly dallying with such deadly foes,
He lodged and dined and garbed them royally,
Rather as guests, than prisoners, in his house.

Pizarro, still at Lima, sent a force
To wrest the old Peruvian capital
From the insurgents. But Orgoñez led
Almagro's band against them, and with speed
Drove them in utter rout. Next there appeared
Old Espinosa from Pizarro's camp
To parley with the rebels: he it was,
The minion of Pedrarias, and the tool
Of Perez, who in countries of the north
Had sought my life. But suddenly, the man,
Seized with some dread, mysterious illness, lay

Twisting and writhing in convulsive pangs
On his last earthly couch: in one short day
He sickened, tossed in agony, and died,
And never a tongue can say to the end of time
Whether foul means made end of him, or no.

Meantime, Hernando in his luxurious cell
With treacherous guards was gambling night and day.
Diego Alvarado, one of these,
Lost an amazing sum: of the vast debt
He tendered part: Hernando waved him off,
Well knowing that the good-will of this dupe
Outweighed a galleon burdened down with gold.
Again Orgoñez sought Almagro: "Sir,"
He asked him, "dost thou keep a tavern here?
Are these men prisoners, or but wassailers
Who eat and drink and gamble, while we stand
Grinning, to shoulder the cost? The publican
Is paid for what he serves: then why shouldst thou
Set entertainment free? Be not deceived!
Mercy and kindness to the wicked shown,
The wicked deem but weakness: favors done
But make them more audacious. Yea indeed!
With those not even thy foes such means must fail.
When did a man ever make in truth a friend
By lavishing money on him? When hath a man,
In drinking and carousing, won a heart
Worthy of winning?" But Almagro said,
"What! Sir Implacable, art growling still?
How narrow art thou! With what meagre hand
Thou dolest out thy good will! But in hate
How liberal!" Then Orgoñez answered him:
"Yea, I am narrow. But the man whose heart
Flows in a straitened channel, loves the more

Profoundly, while the free and easy heart,
Taking in multitudes, like a wide stream,
Is only ankle-deep. Yea, I have foes,
And all my foes I hate. But sir, choose not
A man without a foe to be thy friend;
For as surely as our mother earth is green,
And skies above are blue, no living man
Without an enemy deserves a friend.”
So thus Almagro, ever urged to smite,
And trusting Alvarado’s loyalty,
Sought out that creature for advice, and he,
Pretending faith and friendship, answered him:
“These brothers were thy youthful comrades; both
Remember olden years, and love thee still
At heart, though lately by unhappy chance
Ye have been sundered. Spare the men, I pray,
And never shalt thou live to rue thy mercy.”
Almagro spared them, but, it soon appeared,
With poor requital: scarce a fortnight passed
Before Gonzalo slipped his cell, and fled.

Almagro and Pizarro then began
Long parleys, that were ended in a truce,
Whereby Almagro bode at Cuzco still,
Pending the adjustment of disputed rights:
Hernando was released, first promising
To leave the province in a fortnight’s time.
Almagro dined Hernando at his house
Ere the departure: falling on his neck,
He bade him Godspeed, and Hernando said,
“I was thy friend of old. In days to come
I shall be zealous to conserve thy rights,
And keep inviolate the treaty’s terms.”
So vowed he; but the pledges that he made

Were frailer than a wisp of thistle-down,
And lighter than the feather of a wren.
Orgoñez, anxious for his chieftain's life,
And mindful of his own, in dull despair
Beheld Hernando, smiling, disappear;
Quickly he drew his hand across his throat,
And cried in words of prophecy too true,
"Orgoñez, for thy friendship to thy chief,
Think what a price thou soon shalt come to pay!"

And scarcely had Hernando wandered forth
A free man, when he openly proclaimed,
"I am absolved from every oath and pledge
Assumed in duress of captivity:
They forced me to the treaty: force is fraud:
Now, sword to sword, we treat on equal terms."
He joined Gonzalo, raised a troop, and marched
On Cuzco, there to meet Almagro's host.
That leader, wrecked in health and spent with years,
Stretched on a litter, to the field was borne,
And on Orgoñez's shoulders fell the load
Of all his urgent duties. By and by,
The armies met in battle on a plain
Anear to Cuzco: on surrounding heights
Were Christian mothers with their children, come
In anguish and in terror, to behold
The deadly struggle where their own close kin
Would smite together, measuring lance with lance
In the last combat for supremacy.
Some wives had husbands ranked upon one side,
And sons upon the other; daughters watched
To see their fathers with their lovers clash,
And sisters looked on brothers faced as foes.
But over all these swarmed a multitude

Of pagans, frantic with ferocious joy
To see the hated white men clinch in war:
Yells of delight and shouts of triumph swelled
Like storms of ocean from the barbarous hordes,
And gloating as the Spanish women wailed,
With screams of laughter many would repeat
That ancient adage of our countrymen,—
“When my distress is old, thine will be new.”

And now began the battle: for a space
The armies struggled with an equal strength.
Like the roar of lions echoing through the hills,
The raucous voice of iron-throated guns
Rolled and resounded. Gaunt, grim condors, perched
On peaks around the battle-field, gazed down,
Expectant of a bounteous feast; but oft,
When great concussions from the cannonade
Vibrated through the clouds, they flapped their wings,
And circling round and round, the evil birds
Would cast great ominous shadows, that athwart
The gory plain where brother slaughtered brother,
Glided like midnight phantoms haunting noon.

In time, Hernando, from his heavy guns
Scattering a blast of murderous chain-shot, felled
Almagro's legions like a field of corn
That sinks to earth from volleying storms of hail.
In vain Orgoñez smote three cavaliers,
Believing each Hernando. Then his horse
Was killed beneath him; so he fought on foot.
At last a chain-shot struck him; staggered and stunned,
He fell, and lay immovable: but soon
Opening his eyes, and seeing swarms of foes
Around him in his utter helplessness,

He shouted, "I am wounded; call a knight
To take my sword." Then snarled some base-born
wretch,

"Take that!" and stabbed his heart. His gory head,
Dissevered, then was lifted on a pike,
Where all Almagro's followers might behold,
And they, beholding, scattered in affright.

Appalling was the carnage of that field.
One cavalier, riddled with seventeen wounds,
Still crawled alive: wroth at the stubbornness
Wherewith the wretch had beaten back his fate,
Hernando's minions made his heart a sheath
For twenty deathful swords. When noontide came,
Deserted by his comrades, dazed and lost,
Almagro fled his litter and seized a mule
That wandered masterless; on this poor steed,
Despite the malady enfeebling him,
He sought to gain the mountains, where, in time
Some cave might yield him refuge. But that eve
They overtook him, dragged him from his mule,
And hooting, yelling, cursing, threw him in chains.

Deep lay the perished and the perishing.
Above, the hosts of aborigines
From lifted throats stormed heaven and earth with
shouts

Like the despairing yet defiant cries
Of gods deposed for newer deities,
Who, abdicating all their ancient thrones,
Go forth to everlasting banishment
In never-ending night of nothingness.

Wildly the savages rushed on the field:
The dead they stripped of every rag and tatter,

Then left them naked to the wild beasts' jaws,
And beaks and talons of the birds of prey.

But kindly hands rescued Orgoñez's corse,
And robed it for a Christian burial.
Sleep thou in peace, Orgoñez! Throughout life
Wild and unrestful wert thou; in the grave
Thy hot, impatient heart shall fret no more.
Thy gallant spirit, once a flaming torch,
Is quenched in darkness. Cool and calm repose
Shall smooth thy pillow in thy last abode:
And thou, unmindful of the loves, the hates,
And heartbreaks in these hapless ways of men,
And all the noisy tumults of this world
Rumbling forever onward overhead,
Shalt slumber through a thousand thousand years.

Cast into prison, racked with bodily pains
And anguish of the soul, Almagro lay
Reflecting drearily on the past. For now
The sweet and holy Jordan of his hopes
Far from the green vales of his Promised Land
Had wandered, to be lost in brackish waves
And bitter of a Dead Sea of despair.

And yet, amazed, he noted by and by
A kindness in his treatment at the hands
Of all his prison guards: beholding this,
Fondly he dreamed of friendliness from those
Who held him captive. Little did he guess
The motive for that kindness! For in truth,
Hernando, ere the battle, being told
That his old rival from his ills would die,
Growled, "Heaven avert that fate before he falls
Safe in my clutches!" So he had him nursed

With tender care: selectest food was served,
To make him strong and sturdy as of yore,
And fitted for his day of punishment.
At first he doomed him to the headsman's axe,
Then destined him later for the strangler's chair.
Aghast at this hard sentence, the old man
Sent for his captor. So Hernando came,
And then the prisoner supplicated long,
Recalling old times, countless favors done;
How he had spared that captor's life; invoked
Their friendship of the past, Hernando's oath.
But when he ceased, a sudden silence fell,
So cheerless, ominous and profound, that he
Who listened might have fancied that he heard
The creeping of the ants on hearth and floor.
Then, breaking that dreary silence like a knell,
Coldly Hernando answered, "Turn at once
Thy thoughts to God, for death is close at hand."

Now Alvarado, smitten with remorse
For double-dealing with Almagro, sought
Pizarro out at Lima. "I have come,"
He said, "to beg thee spare Almagro's life.
He was thine old companion; let thy heart
Forget not how ye once have cleaved together.
But if that plea avail not, for my sake
His death forbid: for I induced this man
To spare thy brothers. Have I not a claim
Upon thee?" But Pizarro, frowning, snarled,
"He is a traitor; let him suffer the doom
Of traitors. What! Because, unjustly, once
He made my brethren prisoners, and forbore
To slay those blameless victims, in the hope
That I would grant his treasonable demands

While they were held as hostages, am I
To spare him in his guilt? Hence: let me be."

But Alvarado, still unsilenced, cried,
"If he must die, permit thou, then, the son
To hold the province that the sire hath ruled.
The boy is innocent of every crime
You charge against his father." "I will not!"
Thundered Pizarro, "for the father lost
All his old rights by treason, and this brat
Stands on no higher ground than stood the sire."
Wroth, Alvarado answered, "Sir, beware!
Some others in this country still have rights
Beside thyself." Quickly Pizarro snapped,
"All countries west of Flanders are mine own!"
And turning his back on Alvarado, left.
The intercessor, thus discomfited,
Returned to Cuzco. From Hernando there
One last poor privilege he begged,—to see
His leader once again: this was denied.
Now came the last night ere the fatal day:
The guards he begged for entrance; when they scowled
And shook their heads, their watch-dog consciences
He lulled to sleep with gold: then the iron gates
Whined in remonstrance as they swung ajar.

Since the old prisoner had regained his strength,
The generous treatment at his keepers' hands
Had ended. In these last days all had changed
From softest ease to hardest misery.
Now entering, Alvarado stood amazed.
For in a stony, dank and gloomy cell,
Upon a bed of straw, Almagro sat.
Amidst the room, upon a battered chest,

Sputtered a tallow candle: standing near,
An empty pitcher and a pinewood stool
Poorly relieved the bareness of the den.
"Old friend! Almagro!" Alvarado cried,
Pressing the veteran's hand. Almagro's eyes
Grew dim, but with a cheery smile, he said,
"I bid thee welcome to my palace, lad;
The Persian carpet now hath been removed
For dusting; the silk cushions of these seats
Hang out for airing; I would offer wine,
Save that my leech forbids it, and my priest
Frowns on it." Alvarado, smiling not,
Exclaimed remorsefully, "This is my work!
O, never shall I cease to hate myself
For leading thee to this! I begged thee spare
Those monsters; now I see with what reward!"
"Grieve not," Almagro answered; "though thy heart
Misled thee, yet thy plea for mercy proved
Thy generous instincts. And remember, son,
Death waits us all, and one as old as I
Can hope for small delay at best." "I come,"
Answered the caller, "but to say 'adieu.'
There is no hope left. In a fortnight's time
I sail for Spain: this cursed land I leave
With eager feet: but O, I could not go,
My dear old leader, without seeing thee,
To grasp thy hand, and bid farewell forever."

Quickly the fated man pricked up his ears.
"Dost thou return to Spain indeed?" he asked
With an eager voice: "Yea," Alvarado answered.
"And thou art known at court?" the veteran asked,
Speaking in whispers. "Yea, well known indeed,"
Rejoined the other. Then Almagro smiled

In his old cynic way. "Come, thou shalt be
My minister of vengeance after death,"
The graybeard chuckled. Then he thrust his hand
Under the straw that made his bed, and drew
Forth from that hiding-place a parchment-scroll,
A little earthen ink-jar, and a quill.
"With my last coin I bribed those guards of mine
To smuggle in these things," he whispered. "Long
Have I been wishing for some friend to come
And pen my will. Thou knowest I could never
Scribble my name: but I can make my mark,
And thus will sign it. Sit thou on this stool,
And write as I shall dictate." So his friend
Seized plume and parchment, and then, word by word,
Wrote as directed: "In the name of God!
Diego de Almagro, facing death,
Proclaims this last will unto all the world:
Unto my gracious lord, the King of Spain,
My worldly goods of every kind I leave.
Making this gift, I avow solemnly
In presence of the Judgment-throne of God,
That false Pizarro and his brothers hold,
Through force and fraud, vast treasures and estates
To me by right belonging. All of these
I now bequeath my sovereign as mine heir,
Trusting His Majesty will force these wretches
To loose their hold on all their fruits of fraud,
And yield them unto his own hands, since he
Is now the lawful owner." Having heard
The will read over by his friend, he scrawled
His mark beneath it, saying, "I am now
Half reconciled to death: for well I know
The miseries of Hernando sure to come
After the reading of this testament.

Like the great Cid, when my right arm is still,
And mine eye dim, and, shrouded for the tomb,
Rigid and cold I lie, I shall yet win,
Though dead, the greatest of my victories.
Soon shalt thou be in Spain,—O would that I
Were going with thee!—but it cannot be,—
Be sure, good friend, thyself to place my will
Safe in the king's own hands; trust not another!
Let not Pizarro know of it; else he
Will wrest it from thy hands, cast it to flames,
And thee to death. Fail not to treasure it
In secret, till the king himself receives it.”
“So it shall be, I swear,” rejoined his friend;
“The king himself shall have it at my hands;
No other man shall read it, or behold,
Or touch it, or suspect it, till that day.”
They parted then forever. With the scroll
Safe hidden, Alvarado passed the guards.

At daybreak, in his cell, the veteran
Breathed his last breath upon the strangler's chair.
Before that hour, Pizarro quietly
Had counseled with Hernando: and although
He knew the sentence ere the judges spoke,
He and his brothers,—as in other days
When Atahualpa met the selfsame doom,—
With loud-voiced grief and crocodilian tears,
Enrobed in blackest mourning for the dead!

But Alvarado, fraught with bitterness,
Returned to Spain: before the King he lodged
Complaints of many evils; slyly then
He handed to the prince Almagro's will.
Wroth was the monarch; for it seemed that he,

The claimant through Almagro, had been robbed.
"What means this?" he enquired. "These men,
methinks,
Have murdered one who loved me well: this deed
Of the Pizarros will I closely scan,
And no man who is guilty will I spare."

Meanwhile, Hernando gathered treasure fast,
To bear to Spain as tribute for the king,
And thus avert the stroke of fate. This done,
He voyaged home again, and sought the court.
There Alvarado stood upon his way;
The multitude had long prejudged the cause
Against him and his clan. But ere five suns
Had risen and descended through the skies,
Without a warning, Alvarado sank
Tortured with dreadful pangs. Within an hour
Pallid and cold he lay, and not one man
In all the kingdom doubted that his end
Had come by poison through some felon hand
Moving in secret from Hernando. Then
Almagro's will, after Almagro's death
Became a fatal weapon, to destroy
The dead man's enemies. For now indeed
Like the great Cid arising from his tomb,
The veteran triumphed, speaking from the grave.
The king believed himself,—Almagro's heir,—
Despoiled of priceless riches. He refused
Hernando audience: in a little while
He cast him into prison. There he lies
In old age, friendless, left to poverty,
And shunned by all the world, even to this day.
And as he languishes alone, his heart,
A ruined Babylon, forsaken save

To desolation, now becomes the haunt
For scorpions of repentance, bat-like shapes
Of evil memories, and the shadowy forms
Of black-maned, fierce-eyed lions of despair.

But still the leader of this clan remained
Unpunished; and though many cried aloud
At God's slow justice, ere He flung His bolt
At false Pizarro, after many days
The sceptics knew their error. Men may doubt
That justice; and, in truth, within this world
Where purblind mortals ever grope in gloom,
Knowledge is Doubt, and Doubt our only Knowledge.
Still, let us not deny those inner truths
We know, yet never comprehend. All the earth
Abounds with real things that seem unreal,
With facts that seem but fiction. Heighth and Depth,
Distance and Space, exist not, yet exist.
There is no Time: yet Time destroys us all.
So mark the ending of this man, whose feet
Crushed down an empire, and behold at last
A retribution from some mighty Power
Voiceless, unseen, mysterious,—slow yet sure.

Pizarro stripped Almagro's followers
Of all their titles and their worldly goods:
Each was reduced to threadbare indigence.
The story goes that twelve in one house lodged,
So poor that only one cloak served for all;
When one hidalgo wore it on the street,
The others all were forced to stay at home!
Their enemies, in arrogance of wealth,
Would pass them with a supercilious air,
Displaying silken doublets, chains and rings,

And all the adornments of prosperity.
The boys yelled, "Men of Chili!" tauntingly,
When seeing the followers of Almagro pass
In clouted garments. These poor gentlemen,
Proud in despite of all their poverty,
Grew more resentful with the passing days.
They met Pizarro with a haughty glance,
And none would doff his cap. Once, on the square,
At night they hanged a hideous effigy
With a black horse-hair beard, with arms and legs
Stuffed out with straw, and a sombrero slouched
Above a devil's face. Under its feet
A board in bulky letters told the crowd,
"Here hangs Pizarro, traitor to the King!"

A camarilla in the end was formed
To free the province from the tyrant's clutch:
Old Juan de Rada, on whose brow the snows
Of more than seventy winters had not cooled
His hot ungoverned spirit, led the band.
When looking at him, inwardly you said:
"This man hath never been a babe in arms,
Never a barefoot lad, nor even a youth!
Nor did he know a mother; to his mouth
No soft maternal breast ever gave suck;
Nay! this stern creature drew no gentleness
From such a hallowed fount. His meat hath been
Flesh of wild creatures, warm and bleeding, borne
Unto his lips carnivorous, in the beaks
Of eagles at some eyrie in the crags.
Or strong, mature and warlike from the first,
Borne only by a father, sprang he forth
From loins of manhood, armed and panoplied,
Like Pallas from the pang-racked brain of Jove."

A score of others joined him; they resolved
To slay Pizarro on his way to mass:
A white flag, to be hung above the street,
Would give the signal. One conspirator
Blabbed out the secret to his priest: the priest
Soon told Pizarro, who, disdaining fear,
Scoffed at the tale. The priest then told the Judge,
By name Velasquez, who in like degree
Mocked at the danger. "See this rod!" quoth he,
"My rod of office; with that in my hands,
No man will dare to offer violence!"
Yet being wary, on the Sabbath day,
Pizarro ventured not to mass. His foes
Were thronged together at Almagro's house,
Awaiting his appearance on the street.
But time elapsed, and yet he passed not by;
They waited longer; still he did not come.
They grew uneasy. Some had heard it said
The tyrant was detained by illness; still,
What man could trust Pizarro? So it seemed
Some rumor must have reached him of their plot,
And if so, God protect them! Hurriedly
They counseled all together; some advised
Deferring of their scheme for future time,
Taking the chance of ignorance of their plans
Upon the tyrant's part. But paltering not,
Old Rada bluntly shouted, "Follow me!
For we are dead men if we hesitate!"

They sallied forth together on the street,
Crying, "Death to the tyrant! Live the king!"
One stepped around a puddle in their way;
Then Rada, wroth, exclaimed, "What! fearest thou
To wet thy feet—thou, who art on thy way

To wade knee-deep in blood?" He bade the man
Begone, nor follow further. So they sped
In haste, without him, to the palace gates.
They reached the doorway, struck the servants
down,
And trampled into the hall. On every side
Attendants fled in terror, crying out,
"Help! Help! they come—the men of Chili come!"
Pizarro dined that day with many friends;
Francisco, his half-brother, was a guest,
Likewise the Judge, Velasquez. When they heard
The strident voice of armed conspirators
Cry out, "Death to the tyrant! Live the king!"
They scattered like a startled flock of sparrows:
None save Francisco lingered with their host.
Scampering, they found a little corridor
That overlooked the garden: they slid down
The columns, and then sped away. The Judge,
To use his hands more freely in descent,
Transferred his rod of office to his mouth,
And so indeed no violence was done
While the rod of office lingered in his hands!

Pizarro ordered that the doors be shut
Between him and his foes: but the command
Had come too late; the doors were flung ajar,
And every servant in the way was killed.
"Where is Pizarro?" rose assassin shouts.
Francisco then was girding on his brother
A suit of armor; rushing to the front,
He with a few attendants fought for life.
Appalling was the struggle; shrieks and shouts
Resounded through the palace. In the fray
Two chief conspirators fell pierced with swords,

And then Francisco was himself transfixed,
Expiring in a crimson pool of blood.

Pizarro, gored to frenzy, joins the fight.
"What ho!" he cries, "ye traitors! dare ye seek
My life here, in my own house?" Lifting his sword,
Quickly he slays two more conspirators.
Now two young pages reach Pizarro's side,
Seeking to save their master or to perish.
Brave boys! No knights more gallant, more superb,
Ever dared death before. Peerless they stand
In youthful beauty, lifting princely brows
Enwreathed with ebon ringlets, and uplift
With eyes like morning stars in April skies,
Bidding the dark defiance. From their necks
Hang golden chains; their violet satin sleeves,
Gold-slashed and velvet-puffed, are overhung
By silken cassocks gay with brilliant hues
Of vermeil and of orange; from their sides
Sashes of scarlet wave. Unterrified
They front the foe: but thrust on thrust is given,
Felling the boyish heroes; from their lips
Trickles the life-blood; now it dyes in red
The snowy collars at their throats. Their cheeks,
That erst were rose-hued marble, pale to white;
Dabbled in crimson are their Parian brows:
Death triumphs as he claims his noble spoils.

The leader, Rada, grown impatient, cried,
"Down with the tyrant! Why this long delay?"
Roughly he seized a comrade in his arms,
And threw him on Pizarro; lightning-swift,
Pizarro pierced the body through and through:
But while his sword lanced one antagonist,

Another foeman gashed his throat; still others
Rushed quickly up, and stabbed him ruthlessly.
"Jesu!" he cried, and fell; he stretched his hand,
And dipping it in blood, made on the floor
A cross of red; he sought to kiss the cross,
But bending down, received another thrust,
That sent his spirit shuddering to its God.

First they resolved his lifeless corse to hang
Upon the public square: but in the end
They gave it to his friends for burial.
For fear of desecration to the grave,
These bore it to a solitary wood:
There, wrapped within its bloody shroud, by night,
With the glare of torches flickering through the gloom,
A few attendants put the clay in clay,
And not one man in all the living world
Would even murmur, "God forgive his sins!"

The priest Valverde next was called to go.³⁹
He and the Judge, Velasquez, boarded ship
At Tumbez for a voyage north. But soon,
Landing upon the isle of Puna, both
Fell in the clutches of the savages
Whom once Pizarro had scourged with steel and flame.
The mad barbarians, thirsty for the blood
Of white men, who had robbed and slain their kin,
With yells ferocious rushed from ambushade,
Seized them in savage joy, danced round their prey,
And frenziedly wielding their black tomahawks,
Took vengeance in a frightful massacre.

Gonzalo, youngest of Pizarro's house,
Became dictator over all Peru.

Almagro's son rebelled; but meeting him
In battle, speedily Gonzalo won,
Dispersed his force, and took him prisoner.
Touched by the youth and beauty of this lad,
Or memories of his father, many came
Praying Gonzalo to be merciful.
But the dictator threw the hapless boy
Into a loathsome dungeon: many days
He penned him there: then, dreaming that the
 crowd
Might love the dark-eyed stripling but too well,
And fearing that the fair youth's comely neck
Might some day lift a head above his own,
That slender young neck, fringed with glossy curls,
He ordered to the block.

Then still more harsh
Became the tyrant; but his end was near:
Fleet as the glitter of a humming-bird
The lifetime of his little sun of glory!
Giddy with pride, he even dared to raise
The banner of revolt against his king.
Aroused, the monarch sent a martial priest,
The valiant-hearted Gasca, to Peru.⁴⁰
This prelate, bold yet diplomatic, proved
More than the equal of his strenuous foe,
Who failed in tactfulness and poise of mind.
The rugged soldiers of the priest were drilled
Daily in warlike movements, and were taught
To bear all hardships and endure all ills.
Rough in their dress and manner, yet alert,
And swift to strike, in camp they seemed a swarm
Of hornets busy at their dreaded nest,
And ever ready at the first alarm

To sally forth, and with their fiery stings
Smite all intruders. But assuming not
War's labors, and avoiding all its pains,
Gonzalo's youthful cavaliers, arrayed
Like their commander, in resplendent garbs
Of saffron silk and velvet laced with gold,
Seemed like a throng of garden daffodils,
Or clustered yellow butterflies that haunt
A little roadway pool on Summer days,—
Yea, and as frail and useless on the field!

Gonzalo boasted of his gallant band,
And prophesied an easy victory
Over the prelate. But at last men saw
His promise was the eagle's, his performance
That of the sparrow. When in readiness,
Forward the priest marched: in a fortnight's time
Half its dominions had the Crown regained.
The armies met near Xauxa: here it was
Gonzalo's brother, in the years before,
Had burned the brave Peruvian nobleman,
And here it was Valverde at the stake
Vainly had sought to turn him from his gods.
Strange retribution! Had the dead man come
To life again, what vengeance had he seen
Repaying all his own wrongs from their clan!
For here one trooper of Gonzalo turned,
And galloped over to the enemy;
Another followed; then another still;
Some horsemen sent to take them, joined the rest:
A troop of infantry deserted next,
And soon the plain between the armies swarmed
With men in flight to join their sometime foes.
Soon half the despot's army had been lost:

The rest, dismayed and frightened, dropped their
arms,

And fled toward the town. In blank despair,
With but a handful of his once-proud host,
Gonzalo stood. "What shall we do?" he asked;
One answered, "Die like Romans"; he rejoined,
"Better to die like Christians"; so he went,
And to the warlike priest yielded his sword.
He begged for that same mercy he himself
In other days had scornfully denied
To young Almagro. But the King recalled
Almagro's will, and all the wrongs it charged
Against him. So, in resurrected might,
Like the great Cid, another victory
The dead man won. Unto the headsman's axe
Was doomed the traitor.

At his own desire,
Friends were denied admission to his cell.
In thought he paced the floor; with pious men
He lingered in confession and in prayer.
When coming forth to die, a black-robed priest
Before him reared aloft a crucifix:
But vain in life, and vainer still in death,
His richest garments for the block he donned;
A gorgeous yellow velvet cloak he wore,
In gold galloon embroidered; rings and chains,
And pendants glittered as he walked along.

The gathered multitude he then addressed,
Saying, "My friends, in life my wealth I scattered
Freely amongst you, saving naught: and thus
I die so poor that not a coin remains
To pay for masses for my soul's repose;

So now I beg you, after all is over,
To pay for masses." Many cried, "We will!"
Then he bowed down before the crucifix,
Spending a little while in silent prayer.
Refusing then the bandage for his eyes,
The headsman struck; his neck was cleaved in twain.
Over the splendid vesture gushed his blood,
The gorgeous yellow velvet dyeing deep
In crimson. Golden pendants, chains and rings,
The headsman claimed for spoils: dripping with gore,
His head was hung upon a gibbet, where
A scroll proclaimed him traitor to the King.
His vast domains were forfeited. His house
Was razed and swept from earth: over the ground
Where once the mansion stood, was scattered salt,
And never a man was suffered from that day
Upon the unhallowed spot to dwell again.

But ghastliest, most fearsome deed of all,
Within the selfsame grave they buried him
Where mouldered both Almagros,—sire and son,—
Two victims of his own imperious clan.
And there they crumble in their tattered shrouds,
And there the victor and the victims wait;
There with each other's hated dust they blend,—
The deadly foes commingling into one,—
Till Gabriel's trumpet rouses all the world,
And bids the sea and land give up their dead.

BOOK XIV

De Soto's Narrative continued—He hears of the death of Pedrarias—His return to Spain—The old landlord and his wife—The meeting with Isabel.

SETTING glad sails to voyage home again,
At last our ship weighed anchor. So I sped
As happy as a liberated bird,
Who, having through the dull and dreary years
Beaten his aching breast and drooping wings
Against the steel bars of a narrow cage,
With trills of triumph soars away through space,
Wild, joyous and untrammelled, to behold
Once more green fields and woods, and azure skies,
And meet again in haunts of wilding flowers—
Dew-spangled dingles overhung with ferns—
The mate he lost in dim, heart-broken youth.

My journey paused a while at Darien,
And there I learned Pedrarias was no more.
In old age and in poverty he died,
An exile from the kindly shores of Spain,
Lost to his kindred and his friends of yore.
In far Peru, no word from Isabel
Had come to cheer me; through the irksome years
No ship with letters at those ports had moored,
And had one sailed those distant seas, with gifts
Of precious messages, we, tortuous leagues

Beyond the mountains, hemmed by savages,
Could never have received them. Every man
And woman on my way through Darien
I asked of Isabel. "Does she still live?
Is she unmarried? Or have convent walls
Closed round her as a nun? Or, tell me, still
Unshrouded, still unwed and free to wed,
Does she await some loved one of the past?"
But all would shake their heads; and some would say,
"I do not know," and some, "I know her not."
So nothing of the damsel could I learn,
Save that her father left her poor indeed.
No, none could say if Isabel were dead,
Or wedded, or had joined a sisterhood,
But something in my spirit leaped with joy,
And bade my heart dance like a morning star
On dewy hilltops early in the dawn,
To feel assured the maid would soon be mine.

Once Jacob toiled for Rachel fourteen years:
Now I had come, when sixteen suns had passed,
To claim my damsel of the Long Ago.
There is no pleasure that this life can yield
Compared with his, who, waiting, long deferred
Through struggles of ungrateful years, at last
From hostile Fortune wrings success. For he
Who draws the prizes of this world too soon,
Disdains them but as gewgaws cheaply won;
But he who buys them at the price of youth,
And pays the usury in his blood and tears,
Will find them sweeter than the toiler's sleep
At cool of evening, after labor done,
More luscious than the fruits a traveler plucks
From vineyards reached through leagues of wilderness,

And more refreshing than the bubbling spring
To pilgrims worn from deserts parched and red.
And the most glorious triumph man can know
Is winning Her, who, first denied by Fate,
Was yet created for that man alone,
And waits the coming of her rightful lord
To vindicate the judgment sealed by God.

At length the day broke when my trusty ship
Stood ready to convey me back to Spain.
How happy was I! Dawn rose in the East
Like Thalia, fairest of the sister Graces,
With radiant eyes, with cheeks that flushed in joy,
And a soft bosom of the creamy clouds
Billowed like snow-peaks tipped with roseate flame.
She led from out the darkness Youth and Love,
And wove resplendent raiment for their limbs
Of orange and of scarlet mists of heaven.
So Dawn rejoiced, and so rejoiced my soul.

Our bark made out to sea, and soon the land
Had faded from us, dream-like, in the west,—
Ah, how my heart exulted, thrilled and throbbed
On its way home to old-time scenes of Spain!
The salt air filled my nostrils with its scent,
The keen salt water sprinkled in my face.
How grateful and refreshing was the sea!
I, panting once in stifling tropic woods,
Whose sluggish, close and languorous atmosphere
Bore not one breeze to fever-burning brows,
But poisoned with its foul malaria—
I, in deep draughts inhaled the ocean air,
Replete with vigor, health and energy,
Cool, clean and wholesome as the breath of God.

A tempest gathered, and the white-caps ran;
The shrouds, hard-strained, would stretch and pull
 and groan,
As though their ropes would snap: so, reefing the sails,
We scudded under bare poles in the storm.
But what cared I? I loved the whole wide world,
And all the whole wide world belonged to me.
I loved the sea and sky, the ocean gale,
The flying sea-birds and the tonic breeze,
And loved the sea-weed clinging to the prow.
I watched the compass in the binnacle,
Rejoiced to see our bark was homeward-bound.
I lingered at the stern, and saw the path
That stretched behind us through the foamy waste:
I saw the stormy petrels walk the waves
Long leagues away from land, unterrified,
Though leaden clouds swept on, and great winds blew,
And monstrous billows rose to gulp them down.
I shouted, "See, O stormy petrel, see,
I, like thyself, far from my rightful nest,
Fear not, but know my journey soon is done—
My journey that shall safely bear me home!"
I stood upon the prow and looked below,
Over the figure-head that faced the sea;
The breakers dashed against me; in my joy
I cried again, "Sweep on, thou ocean gale!
For every breath thou blowest brings more near
The shores of Spain, the welcome of my love!"
I climbed the mainmast; bent as if to break,
It rocked and swung me in the gust on high.
The tempest mingled sea and sky together
In one vast misty sheet of leaden gray:
The rain splashed in my face; winds took my breath.
Yet standing on the main-top far aloft,

I shouted, "O ye heavens, black with clouds,
And rent with rushing blasts, I trust you still!
For well ye know why thus I brave your frown,
And ye will guide me to my port of dreams!"

Why tell of all that voyage's delights?
At last the hills of Spain appeared afar.
Mine eager heart gushed forth with happiness,
Mine eyes grew misty with their unshed tears.
Gray-feathered sea-gulls gathered like a cloud,
Making a convoy for our goodly ship,
And following us to port, still sailed around,
As if in welcome to our long-lost home.
Beneath a friendly promontory's lee
Then we cast anchor, and stepped out to shore:
So after sixteen years, my gladsome feet
Once more were treading in their boyhood land.

The time was summer, as it once had been
In far-off youth, when first I sailed away.
I journeyed through the country till I came
To that same town where Isabel had lived,
And I had lingered ere I went to sea.
Then I was but a smooth-cheeked, slender lad;
Now, I returned at five-and-thirty years,
As bushy-bearded as the heathen Turk.
So no one hailed me. As I passed along
The old familiar streets my bosom loved,
Few faces that I saw I now recalled,
And not one creature, brute or human, there,
Remembered me. My heart sank. Where were all
Those friends of boyhood, dear to memory,
Who, at our parting in the long ago,
With wistful eyes had wished me happiness,

And wrung my hand, commending me to God?
Where now my triumph after all my toils?
For they who might have joyed, since I had won
The struggle that had cost me half my life,
Forsaking me, had sought another world,
And none would greet me on my victory.
Ah me! Life loses all its dearest dreams,
And Earth grows cold and hard, in sixteen years!

As night was falling, soon my steps I turned
Toward the old inn, where, before I sailed,
The gray inn-keeper and his kindly dame
Had given their blessing and their good advice.
I reached the ancient inn; my heart was glad
To find the landlord and his wife still living.
Bent were the two with added weight of years;
Their locks, once gray, hung now in spotless white.
Once poor, the couple had grown poorer still;
Dilapidation and decay I saw
Whatever way I turned. But now I cried,
“Landlord! the time for supper comes; serve thou
The meal here, in my room; and bring beside
A flagon of canary: take no heed
Of cost or pains, but bring thy very best,
And thou shalt not regret it.” “It shall be
As thou hast ordered,” piped the graybeard. Soon
A plenteous, wholesome meal,—a plump young fowl,
With bread and cheese,—was served. Likewise they
brought
Peaches and grapes, and honey in the comb,
And warm and generous tawny-tinted wine,
To cheer and gladden. As the flagon came,
“Here, father, and thou, mother, too,” quoth I,
“Sit down, and toss a friendly glass with me.”

They hesitated, at each other glanced,
And then, with many smiles and bows, complied;
But neither called to mind their youthful guest.
Both voluble, they chattered on and on,
About this one or that, my former friends;
Of many dead; some gone to sea; some poor;
A few grown rich and moved to other towns,
And not a few with whereabouts unknown.

And then I asked them, "Did ye know a lad,
Hernan De Soto,—was he not your guest
In years long past? Do ye remember him?"
"Oh yes!" exclaimed the couple in a breath;
Both tried to talk at once, but the old man,
Taking the cue himself, suppressed his wife,
And answered first for both: "I knew him well,
A friendly, open-hearted boy, but yet
Inclined to rove, and lacking steadiness.
He never lived here, but he often came
To see the daughter of Pedrarias.
Well, then, he wandered to America,
And no man here hath seen him since he left,
Though rumor reached us that he gathered wealth,
And wed some Indian princess overseas."
"Oh what a shame!" the fond old woman cried,
"To think that boy should take a heathen wench,
Turning his back on one like Isabel!
I'll not believe it! Not a better lad,
And not a lad more comely, ever lived,
Than he who came to woo our Isabel."
"Peace, peace, my good dame," interposed her lord,
"What knowest thou of that thou pratest? Why,
As thou hast heard, Pedrarias died so poor
His friends were taxed to bury him. What then

Was left as dowry for his daughter's wedding?
But more; the sire refused to give her hand
To this young fellow. Wouldst thou blame him, then,
When he was rich, for seeking a wife elsewhere?"

And now the ardor that had once illumed
My soul with brilliance, flickered in my breast;
I knew not whether the damsel now were dead,
Or still worse, cloistered in a sisterhood,
Or worst yet, wedded to another. Thus,
As it must ever be, reaction came:
From apprehension, exultation died.
So then I faltered, "Does she live?" "O yes,"
Quickly they answered. With a lightened heart,
But anxious, asked I, "Hath she taken vows?"
"Oh no," they answered laughing, "surely not;
Her sister only hath assumed the veil."
Relieved, but with a heart more anxious still,
I asked, "And hath she married?" "No," they said,
And then the old dame added, confident,
"The damsel will not mate with living man
Till her own lover comes from overseas."

Once more elated, smiling radiantly,
I brimmed her glass again. Encouraged thus,
Despite her spouse's late disparagement,
The ancient gammer reassumed her thread
Of discourse: "Isabel this very night
Is biding at a kind señora's house
A paltry distance down this very street.
Her old home long ago was lost, to pass
Into a stranger's hands: so, with this friend,
Her playmate of those days when her own sire
Was rich and proud, and courted by the great,

She lives at times, though others she once knew
Neglect her in her poverty. But still
There's many a suitor who would gladly lay
His riches at her feet to win her hand:
All these the maid refuses: O, be sure
That lad beyond the seas is favored still."

And now I blurted out, "Landlord! and thou
My good old mother, know that I am he,
Thy lad of olden times, returned at last."
The faithful woman started in amaze;
A little skeptical at first, but soon
Convinced, she shouted, "There! I told thee so!
The lad has come to marry Isabel!"
With that she hugged me, vise-like, in her arms,
And kissed me, bushy-bearded though I was,
As if her truant were a boy again.
The old man, silent, wrung me by the hand,
And welcomed with his misty, honest eyes.

The old dame seized her headgear in a trice;
"I'll go and tell her!" cried she, out of breath.
"No, no!" quickly I answered, "do not go.
I must reveal myself to Isabel."
Then noting the disappointment in her face
At being thus deprived of bearing news,
And knowing how her sex loved such a task,
I added, "I alone must see her first;
Tell all the gossips in thy neighborhood,
And only leave to me this maiden's ear."
So, half placated by this compromise,
Of cups and plates she hastened to dispose,
Anticipating in her flustered heart
The joy of telling first amazing news

To friends and neighbors, of the lost returned.
 I gave the landlord freely of my hoard;
 His eyes danced in his head; "Gold, gold!" he cried,
 "Thou givest ten times more than is our due:
 Not in a twelvemonth have we earned so much."
 I hastened off, his endless thanks to end,
 And as I wandered on to Isabel,
 I saw the ancient housewife hurry away
 Another route, breathless, to breathe her news.

I sped the way my friends had pointed out,
 And stood at last before the gate I sought.
 The soft midsummer night was close and warm;
 A swan-like moon was swimming in the skies.
 A great stone mansion, old and gray, I found,
 Along whose front upreared a portico,
 Where roses clambered with their fragrant blooms.
 Before the house a dense-limbed orange tree
 Hung spheres of yellow through its gloomy green,
 And, sprinkled over with its starry flowers,
 Breathed forth delicious perfume on the breeze:
 A thick grape-arbor at one side distilled
 Ambrosial odors from its clustered fruit.
 The night, which makes all sweet scents sweeter still,
 Seemed swooning in its aromatic airs.

The moon had quenched the light of smaller stars;
 But one, a palpitating crimson orb,
 Hung like a quivering dewdrop tinged with blood.
 For fear the beams my presence might betray,
 I leaped the wall, slipped under shadowy boughs,
 And hid behind a fig-tree by the steps.
 Upon the portico two ladies sat;
 And now my bosom bounded like a roe

To see that one was Isabel! Ah, yes,
Yes, it was she! But not the little maid
With whom I plighted troth in vanished years.
This maiden was a woman, tall, mature,
With woman's queenly bearing. I could mark
Through silvery gleams each aspect of her face:
A shade of sadness flitted in her smile,
A serious glance fell from her chastened eyes.
She, once a tender April hyacinth,
Was now the full-blown rose of mellow June.
The damsel I had known in years of yore
Was fresh and piquant as a dewy dawn,
But this, my empress, noble, calm of brow,
Stood at her white meridian, and yet
Blest with a sweet and pure serenity,
Was like the vesper hour, when the skies
Droop kind and gentle in their loveliness,
When glare of noontide dims to softest blue,
And in the east appears the modest moon.
Her love, which once had thrilled me with delight,
Now brought me peace and rest and quiet joy.

The woman by her side leaned half in shadow,
But I could see her face, likewise, was fair:
Her years were nigh the same as Isabel's.
This lady of the house, I gathered soon
From fragments of their converse overheard,
Had wedded early, and lived happily.
True to the ancient instincts of her sex—
All women are match-makers, born and bred—
She urged her friend to choose a mate at once,
And cease to wait for me. With her right hand
She tinkled and she thrummed a light guitar.

Often the Spanish ladies improvise,
Spontaneous verses forming as they play:
So then her argument she fused with song:

“Time flies, and flying, gathers one by one
The buds that burgeon at Life’s golden gate;
Be wooed and wedded ere thy day is done;
Man roams afar, but woman can not wait.

“The bird without a mate must cease to sing,
The rose, neglected, shatter on her spray;
The vine must perish where it can not cling,
The summer, reft of sunshine, pass away.

“When strands of silver thread thine ebon locks
Like webs of moonbeams as the night grows late,
Sweet Love no longer at thy portal knocks;
Man roams afar, but woman can not wait.

“Man sails the seas for glory, wealth or power,
For court, or camp, or battle-field departs;
We, left behind, from lonesome hour to hour
Hear but the beating of our restless hearts.

“Youth, like a fragile morning-glory bloom,
Long ere the noontide meets his hapless fate;
Haste, ere thy queenly beauty suffers doom;
Man roams afar, but woman can not wait.”

But Isabel now seized her friend’s guitar,
And answered quickly, improvising thus:

“Hernando! my adored one and my king,
My heart thou hast, in youth or manly prime;
Thy breast alone shall ease my broken wing:
He never loved who loved a second time.

"Thou wert most courteous of all cavaliers
That ever doffed a plume or donned a glove;
Proud over all, I moved among my peers,
And high-born ladies envied me thy love.

"The rose of Pæstum blooms and blooms again—
Twice in the same year of its gentle clime;
But love blooms only once in hearts of men:
He never loved who loved a second time.

"Thou wert the bonniest lad that ever trod
The graceful measures of the airy dance,
The knightliest knight whose steed disdained the sod,
The bravest brave that ever couched a lance.

"True souls, when once their mutual pledge is given,
Are wedded like the rhythm and the rhyme;
The faithful heart is not deceived or driven:
He never loved who loved a second time."

When she had ended, from the fig-tree's boughs
Emerging suddenly, I cried aloud,
"Lady, I come myself from overseas,
Where I have seen thy lover. O, waste not
Thy precious hours awaiting his return;
I know him false—as every man is false
When parted from the loved one of his youth.
Dream not that any man this side of heaven
Will keep his plighted vows through sixteen years;
Inconstant as the clouds, as wings of birds,
His pledges all are scattered lavishly,
Like cheap and thoughtless kisses of a child."
At first she gasped, "Who *art* thou?" But before
My answer came, she cried in joyous tones,

"I know thee! Bronzed and bearded as thou art,
No thin disguise can cheat my watchful soul;
My knight thou art, come late, but not *too* late!"
I rushed toward her: seized within mine arms,
She laughed and wept, and wept and laughed again.

The lady of the house soon went within,
Leaving us in our rapture all alone.
I said to Isabel, "My youth has fled;
The charms thou sawest once in me are gone."
"Nay, nay!" she cried, "Time glideth stealthily,
And blinds the lover to the loved one's age;
Love's idol in Love's eyes grows never old;
Once young to Love, Love sees thee ever young."
So thus we sat together, hand in hand,
Absorbed in our own selves, while stars and moon
Seemed joyous at the joy they spied below.

Part III

BOOK XV

End of the second night's Narrative—The third night's gathering—Vasconcelos, the Portuguese—De Soto's Narrative continued—His discontent with wealth and ease—The enticements of the New World—El Dorado—Alvar Nuñez and his adventures—De Soto's meeting with him—The return to America—The West Indies—De Soto, over the protests of Isabel, proceeds on an expedition to Florida.

DE SOTO ceased. When thus had reached its end
In triumph the love-story of that pair,
Alonzo glanced at Lulla furtively,
But quickly hung his head: then Lulla turned
Her deep dark liquid eyes upon the youth,
And sighed. After a pause, the Governor
Said unto Micalusa, "Midnight comes:
Thou and thy daughter must be wearied. Though
The storm hath much abated, still I fear
On such a night to see ye go. But, sire,
If ye will tarry with us as before,
This lad, I know, will gladly yield his tent
Again, to serve thee and thy child. My story
May fail to please thee. But if thou wouldst hear
The sequel of it, on the coming eve
I will conclude." "My gracious lord," replied
The Soldan of the forest, "it would please
Me and my daughter much to hear it all.
But thee and thy young kinsman first we thank
For this, your offer, which we now embrace."

The next night came, serene, yet bitter cold.
Above the camp, on a gnarled, twisted bough,
Morose and crabbed, like a savage churl,
A huge brown horned owl, in a hoarse voice
Grumbled and growled. Perched on a neighboring
tree,

A fretful screech-owl, like his beldame squaw,
A child again with age, whimpered and whined.
Splendid yet cold, the pallid moon arose
Thin-veiled in fleecy clouds, and shuddering
In the keen frosty winter skies, above
The wilderness of gaunt black leafless trees,
And over Earth's vast winding-sheet of snows,
Like a sad bride, who, wedding not for love,
Glides forth in ghostly silvern splendor, wan
From vigils of despair, giving her hand
Unto the bridegroom, while her broken heart
Unto another belongs for evermore.

Within, was tropic warmth and cheer. In came
Gallegos, puffing vapor through his beard
That bristled with icy needles: closely round
His sturdy shoulders wrapped a panther's fur,
While on his pate a cap of raccoon skin
Slouched, with the brush for pendant. As he rubbed
And clapped his hands together, in his head
Chattered his teeth; and like a mastiff huge
Shaking the water from his burly frame
When finding shelter from a thunderstorm,
The veteran quaked and shivered, seeming to fling
The chillness from him. Hugging close the fire,
"Beshrew me, but 'tis cold!" he blustered, while
Before the crackling flames his palms he warmed.
Alonzo shuffled in, staggering beneath

A mighty heap of wood: beside the hearth,
That giant load, low-bending, he then cast
With clangorous thunder down. From his big feet
Stamping the snow, next from the pile of wood
He lifted a great log, and this he threw
Into the fire. It crashed among the brands
Already burning, sending up the sparks
In swarms like myriad fireflies, and the roar
Of conflagration making louder still.
Like round and ruddy apples glowed his cheeks,
As through his fingers numb and stiff with cold,
Held to his pursed-up mouth, softly he blew
His young breath, warm and grateful. Soon around
The Governor's hearth had gathered once again
The listeners of the night before, save one,
Anasco, who was missing. In his place,
A nobleman of grave yet courtly air,
The Portuguese, Vasconcelos,⁴¹ was seen:
By all high-honored was he. Dark his eye,
And olive-hued his brow; his stately beard
In brown waves swept his bosom; on his face
One read of valor, truth and dignity.
So then De Soto to that audience:

I now was wealthy, marked and sought of men,
Surrounded by a host of pleasing friends;
But, blessing of all blessings, I had won
My bosom's darling, Isabel, to be
My sweet comrade forever. Now we lived
In more than royal splendor; eve by eve,
At our regales, the high-born, rich and great
Thronged, eager to be numbered with our guests.
At festal-board, red roses trailed with white,
The topaz-tinted manzanilla glowed,

While zither, flute and viol sobbed and sighed,
Or trilled ecstatic, unto reveling hearts.
We wore rich raiment: every trivial wish
A throng of menials waited to fulfill.
My monarch showered me with titles,—strewed
His badges and his ribbons lavishly.
What was there left for heart of mine to crave?
One thing, and one thing only: *The desire*
For one desire that might not be fulfilled.

Amid the persiflage that lightly sprang
From lips of Wit or Beauty, I was ware
Of distant thunder of unresting seas.
Enwreathed with banquet blossoms, in its glass
Untouched remained the red or golden wine,
While I sat dreaming of the tropic fruits
With tang and flavor unsurpassed on earth,
Which once I plucked fresh from their native boughs.
While fanned by gentle Andalusian airs,
I yearned for mist-clad mountains crowned with
snow:

Amid the gibes of chattering throngs at court,
Of jungle and of swamp I felt the lure;
The panther from his forest called me back,
And dared me brave him in his tangled lair;
The plumed and painted savage shook his lance,
And in defiance bade me face his wrath.

So thus I longed my couch of ease to spurn,
And roam again through perils far away.
What means this ceaseless discontent? Without
That urgent force, the world would die in sleep.
None but the fool, or one with ends to serve,
To knowledge of The Deity pretends;

The wisest grope in midnight ignorance
Of Him who from the Silence rules us all;
God having made us so, submit we must,
Nor doubt the wisdom of divine decrees.

Throughout all Spain men's hearts were set on fire
With stories of our empire in the West:
With bated breath some spoke of Mexico:
Some heard in speechless wonder of Peru.
Cortez,—Pizarro,—magic names were these,
To conjure visions of transcendent wealth.
Those in the noon of manhood stood aroused
To action,—godlike action,—and they rushed
In eager haste to seek the new-found realms;
Boys ran away to sea; old men forsook
Their life-long homes to join the maddened throngs.
The West was like a siren flushed with youth,
And splendid with a mystic brilliancy,
Who lured men onward to her magic isles
With more than woman's blandishments and charms.
I, like the rest, was roused: my warm blood surged,
A-tingle for the conflict; sloth and ease
I flung away contemptuous, for I felt
A strange, resistless impulse snatch my hand.
What charms had dull repose? I heard the shout
Of bold Adventure, calling, "Follow me!"
It thrilled my pulses like a bugle-blast,
And hurling down the chains of idleness,
Mine eager feet sprang ready for the march.
"Lull me no more, O Luxury!" I cried,
"With silken flatterers, soothing parasites:
Once more I seek the camp, the flood, the field!"

Then day and night, dreamed all adventurous souls
Of El Dorado. He, the Golden One,

A peerless monarch, sways a realm superb—
A bloomland never-failing in its joys—
With haunted vales, with wild, romantic heights—
Hid in the trackless western wilderness.
Enchanting is that princedom, garmented
In forests and savannahs evergreen,
In verdant meadows strewn with gemlike flowers—
A land of efflorescence virginal,
Where never adder hisses, viper stings,
Nor Winter, like a wild boar, comes to waste
The fields by songs of Spring made jubilant.

Ah, happy vistas, never-yellowing bowers
Of fruits and flowers beneath unsnowing skies!
Here Flora and Pomona, sisters sweet,
Rove hand in hand, and scatter lavishly
Their riches from exhaustless treasuries.
Here like an Indian empress, crowned with plumes,
In sempiternal verdure springs the palm.
Here vermeil blossoms on pomegranate boughs
Seem fiery stars in firmaments of green.
The orange groves, a gladsome wilderness,
Hang fruits unripe and ripe, the sour and sweet,
With bloomy sprays beside deflowered stems;
Or bending over waters purling by,
They strew their shattered petals in the stream,
That, like a mirror, duplicates below
The pendent golden globes within its flood.

And here the peerless jasmine from her bower,
Intoxicating bacchanalian gales,
Dispenses rich aroma. Like a flame,
Flushes the red hibiscus. Pink and soft,
Through chaplets of its green and glossy leaves

Blossoms the oleander. Heliotropes
Breathe fragrant breath, as fragile, dim and sweet
As memories of the one whom first we loved.
Down swing purpureal morning-glories, bright
And evanescent as the dreams of youth.
Here pure magnolias of the pallid brows,
Like vestals scattering incense at their shrines,
And lucent lilies, red and yellow, gowned
Like gorgeous queens in coronation-robes,
Emparadise these gardens of the blest.

Manoa is the city of that King:
Its glittering domes and spires and pinnacles,
All reared of virgin gold, lift to the skies
Their lambent glories like a world on fire.
Around it is a vernal forest, sweet
With spicy, bloomy trees that never fade;
From arching boughs delicious fruits are hung,
And birds sing through the morning, noon and night.
Throughout the dark green of the wildwood shades
Sweep crystal brooks with creamy cataracts,
Where rocks of agate and of amethyst,
And diamond pebbles, fleck with sparkling fires
The sands of burnished gold-dust. In the midst
Of that poetic realm the palace-walls
Rise like resplendent flaming sunset clouds.
There purple blazoned pennons float on high;
There bugles peal in triumph, cymbals clash,
And sounds of tabor, harp and dulcimer
Regale the soul with halcyon harmonies.
And there in dazzling halls the monarch reigns
With splendor greater than the orient kings
Have wrung from famed Golconda's jeweled mines.
There maids voluptuous and delectable

Trill dulcet notes from lips melodious,
And crush Dejection like a faded rose
Under the joyance of their dancing feet.
There sits enthroned the Emperor, glorified
In pæans, lulled of chants and cadences,
Beneath the flaunting streamer, trophied shield,
With jeweled arms and ankles, hands and feet,
With golden lilies circled on his brows,
And gold-dust powdered in his glossy hair.

Around his throne, birds fashioned out of gold
Are made to sing the Ruler's ceaseless praise:
Peacocks with sapphire necks and emerald trains,
Spread plumes like rainbow clouds above his head,
And lions, lifting wings of eagles, starred
With myriad eyes of jasper, speak like men,
Proclaiming with their voices deep and grand,
"Fall down in homage, O ye mighty throngs,
To El Dorado, favorite son of God!"

Such was the realm, as many travelers told,
Of El Dorado. One of those whose eyes
Had seen that kingdom, Alvar Nuñez, came
During these days before the Spanish Court,⁴²
Telling his wild adventures. Long before,
This strange old man had sought the western world,
And with Narvaez, on the selfsame ship
That bore our comrade, Ortiz, he had sailed
For the Floridian shores. Thou hast been told
In part, by Ortiz, of their sufferings.
Narvaez, having by his deeds malign
Provoked to wrath the natives, fled before
Their warriors. Half his army being lost,
In desperation, he resolved to build

A little flotilla, venture out to sea,
And gain the shores of Mexico. His men
Slaughtered a horse, and from the skin they made
A clumsy bellows; then they lopt a bough,
That, hollowed out, became a wooden pipe,
And thus a rude forge yielded welcome aid.
They took their glaives, their stirrups and their spurs,
And in their smithy beat or melted them
Roughly, to serve as hatchets, saws or nails.
So with these tools, after long weeks had passed,
Five little boats were finished. Every horse,
To yield them food upon the way, they slew,
And every horse's skin was made a sail,
Or, baglike, sewed to carry water. Thus,
Enduring thirst and hunger, cold and heat,
Tormented ever by the savages,
Through weary moons they skirted on the coast.
A frightful storm arose; four boats went down;
Their sailors all were lost; among the rest,
Narvaez, as thou knowest, met his fate,—
Drowned with his comrades in the vengeful sea.
The crew upon the shallop that escaped,
Old Nuñez and his comrades, crawled ashore,
And sought to plod to Mexico by land.
Beholding endless wonders, made the sport
Of danger, suffering cruel agonies
In passing nation after nation by,
Onward they wandered for a thousand leagues.
The Indians chased them, and wild beasts pursued:
They panted on the burning deserts, starved
In many a barren wilderness. At last,
Grown ravenous for food, friend butchered friend,
And comrade ate his comrade greedily.
After eight years of nameless miseries passed,

But four of all limped safe to Mexico,—
Old Nuñez and three others, and of these
Three others, one a negro. Alvar then,
Sated with horrors of his pilgrimage,
From Mexico made haste for shores of Spain.

Strange stories of those lands the wanderer told,—
Of glorious cities, precious metals, gems,
Of silver streets and mansions reared of gold,—
Splendors that made Peru and Mexico
Seem lands of beggary. Yet to no man
Who sought him, would his lips reveal the names
Of those transcendent realms, nor where they lay;
“These things are all reserved to tell the king,
And him alone,” he said. “Surely,” I thought,
“This empire may be found; and so I vow
To seek it to the end of all the world,
And win it, or else perish in the quest.”
I sought the old man, saying unto him,
“Thy wondrous stories of the western world
Have reached mine ears. I, somedea, in the past
Likewise have wandered through those distant wilds,
And feel, that though thy tales be marvelous,
Thou dost not cozen us. Glad would I be
If thou wouldst go with me, and be my guide
Upon a voyage to those golden realms.”
He scanned me over shrewdly, winked his eye,
And shook his head: “No, no, I can not join
Thy troop,” he answered with a cryptic smile,
“For I should be the commander, should I go:
To no man would I be an underling.”
So then I left him, seeing him no more.

I set about my company to form.
Moscoso, whom thou seest, joined me first;

Beside me he had faced Peruvian spears.
Lobillo, then, and Nuño de Tobar,
My old companions, likewise, in Peru,
Enlisted: gladly did I welcome them.
From homes beneath the skies of Portugal
Came thronging bands of gallant cavaliers,
Hailing from valleys where the Tagus beams
Through flowering almond orchards, or the heights
That lift redoubted Elvas on her perch,
An eagle of the cliffs. These proved themselves,
Under their noble chief, Vasconcelos,
The doughtiest of the doughty in my host.
Now I became a marquis at the hands
Of my kind sovereign, who likewise bestowed
The realms of Cuba and of Florida
Upon me as his viceroy.⁴³ True as Truth,
Mine Isabel disdained to lag behind
In idlesse and in ease and luxury,
But left her home to wander by my side.

My army was the goodliest ever seen,
The noblest band of knights and gentlemen
That ever captivated maidens' hearts,
Or grappled foe upon the bloody field.
For there were plumed and mounted cavaliers,
With morions glittering like the morning sun,
And with them, grim and grizzled veterans
As stout and valorous as the lion's brood,
And graceful youths, tall, slender, beautiful,
With speedy limbs, strong hands and nimble feet.
And there were lissom, fair-haired, clear-eyed lads,
Torn from their fathers' and their mothers' arms,
The darlings of their households; gently born,
And reared in silken softness were those boys,

And yet like keen-eyed leopards, swift and sure
To pounce upon the foe and snatch their prey.

A sight superb it was, that Sunday morn
At San Lucar, in April, when our fleet
Stood ready for the journey overseas.
Above that vast white wilderness of sails
In benediction glowed the morning sun:
A trumpet sounded; other trumpets joined,
Till earth and sea and sky seemed all a-thrill
With martial music, glorious, wild and sweet.
Boys flaunted beauteous pennons overhead,
And maidens scattered nosegays in our path.

Brilliant in vesture were our cavaliers!
Down the long city highway rode my knights,
With ribbons gay, with varicolored hose,
With cassock or with doublet sable-hued
And edged with buff or purple. Others marched
Flaming in velvet, silk or samite, flecked
With pearls, or traced with gold embroidery,
Or fringed with gold galloon. One might have
dreamed

A field of poppies in resplendent bloom
Some necromancer with enchanted wand
Had changed to marching multitudes of men.
Sleeves puffed and slashed and paneled gorgeously,
Or fringed with argent laces, lightly bore
Against their gold-enspangled scarlet, lute,
Guitar or viol,—toys of gallantry:
Or they bore seemlier burdens,—glittering spears,
Or lances, poised at rest. Escutcheoned shields,
Embossed in silver, with enamelings
In azure, vert, and or, with couchant pard,

Or rampant, lion, wolf or boar, appeared
To snare the sun's rays and imprison them,
So splendent was their lustre on that morn.

Our hearts, elated, throbbed and throbbed in time
To the glad cadence of our marching feet;
The drum beat, and the shrill fife pierced the air;
Plumes waved and nodded, polished armor gleamed;
The red and yellow banners waved on high.
Then there were hasty partings, fond farewells,
Tears and embraces, prayers, and calls and cries.
And there stood, disappointed, at the piers,
Lads who had yearned to join our company,
But met rejection; being thus condemned
In prosy homes to lag behind, and mope
Forsaken and forgotten, as we braved
The occidental oceans in our quest
For fame and fortune, they beheld with tears
The billowing sails that bore us from their world.

Delightful was our voyage. By and by,
Along the Caribbean Sea we sailed,
And Mexic Gulf, among the charming isles
That, like a throng of birds in radiant green,
Cleave oceans like a sky celestial blue.
Ah, Paradisal haunts of fruits and flowers!
Here citrons in their orchards glow and gleam,
Scenting the shadows with delicious airs;
Here green and golden melons twine and trail;
Pineapples, spicy as a seraph's breath,
Are lifting with their coronets of spears;
Bananas hang their broad green glossy leaves,
Their mellow clusters and their purple blooms;
Low droops the monstrous fig-tree with his figs;

Ambrosial mangoes through the leafy green
Hang copper-tinted. From their cool shades
The lemons scatter odorous oval fruit,
Till zephyrs, overburdened with perfume,
Swoon on their palpitating airy wings.

Here tropic forests, dense, luxuriant, dark,
Lift lordly cypresses, majestic palms,
Laurels and plumed acacias: overhead,
Close-intertwining, interlacing all
With spirals convolute and tendril-snares,
Like blandishments and wiles and witcheries
That weave the meshes of the God of Love,
Lianas twist and tangle, drooping down
Their crimson festoons with their verdant wreaths,
And binding wedded blossoms heart to heart.

Above that Eden's bloomy wilderness,
Like throngs of pansies set afloat on wings,
Are fluttering blue and yellow butterflies.
The whirling, swirling, twirling humming-birds,
(Those bright banditti of the southern skies
That rifle sylvan hoards of honey-dew),
Describe their glittering orbits through the air,
Or dandle infant buds upon the boughs,
Or gambol with the sunbeams and the breeze.
Where yon luxuriant fields of sugar-cane
Sweep seaward like a shadow emerald-green,
And where the iris-colored ocean laves
With dimpling frolic surf its yellow sands,
The damask-hued flamingoes fleck the sky.

Here intersprinkled on the saffron beach
In frail and airy stranded argosies,

Lie fluted pink and purple ocean shells.
Though the dark waves seem liquid indigo,
Ten fathom deep the sandy bottom shines,—⁴⁴
So limpid and diaphanous the sea,
One looking down may well believe his boat
Suspended in transparent fields of air!
Here cleaves the oyster: yonder clings the sponge:
There lift the coral boughs of red and gray,
Like trees aflower in enchanted lands.
Behold the seaweeds, purple, brown and green,
With weird, unearthly blossoms pendulous,
That never quiver in the airs of heaven!
There hangs the moonfish, silvery, circular,
A polished mirror for the sea-nymph's bath.
The sunfish glides with scintillating scales,
As though in jeweled armor panoplied.
But never trills or warblings wake those bowers;
No sound uprises in those songless realms;
The petals of those blossoms never thrill
Or tingle with embraces of the bees.
There, free alike of zephyrs faint and soft,
And raging storms that lash infuriate seas,
As quiet, calm and cool as Death itself,
In melancholy beauty, ages old,
The same blue world is blue for evermore.

Beyond all other realms are blest these isles;
But when did Beauty not allure to woe?
Else here had been an Eden found on earth
To lure the saints from thrones in Paradise.
Two baleful rivals love these Island Queens,—
The Pestilence, and the tropic Hurricane.
These strive for mastery: in their dreadful wake
Reign desolation, anguish and despair.

Amid the fragrant airs that haunt those bowers,
One deadly Shade breathes poisoned breath: alas!
The cheeks his touch caresses all must fade,
The lips he kisses all must cease from smiles,
The eyes that meet his glances all must dim.
Ah, well the heart knows, by its quickened beat,
Thy stealthy, noiseless tread, O Pestilence!

Sometimes a strange weird silence awes the land,
While Nature breathes in whispers, glides tiptoe,
And seems to shiver with a nameless dread;
But soon the scene is darkened; in a stound
Sweeps through the skies a frightful hurricane;
Like reeds the palm-trees snap; gigantic vines
Are snatched in tatters like a cobweb's threads;
Enormous trees, uprooted, thunder down;
Like chaff, the native huts are puffed away,
And earth and sky and ocean blend in one,—
One vast, wild wreck of darkness, terror, storm.

The lovely Cuban isle our barks attained
In safety. Through one year I lingered there,
For the fair scenes of that seductive clime
Allured me someddeal from my purpose. Oft
Would I to Isabel exclaim, "Fate calls,
And calls me ever. The Floridian shores
My lands of destiny must henceforth be:
Refuse I dare not; I can but obey."

With tears she still would answer, "Ah, why spurn
These happy realms, those barren wilds to rove?
Above thee, arch benignant beaming skies;
Around thee, blooms a never-dying spring:
Why tempt the horrors of those northern climes,

Their savage deserts and their savage tribes?
Why art thou restless still? Here bide content,
Tame thy wild feet, and wander earth no more."
"O spouse of mine, I love thee none the less,"
Said I responsive, "but my heart cries 'Go!'
And go I must, though all the world forbid.
Sweet is thy love for me; but I should not
Merit that love should I that call defy,
And loiter, shirking duty, at thy side:
Not sweet, but bitter, then thy love would prove,
Bestowed upon me, undeserving. Dear,
I pray thee, let me go."

So now I went
About my great emprise. After long days,
Our fleet stood ready for the northern seas.
Mine Isabel with many sighs oft begged
That I should take her with me, saying, "Since
Thy bosom hath been steeled to all the prayers
That would restrain thee here, O yet allow
The partner of thy soul with thee to wend,
And share the perils that are still to come
Among those desert realms." But I rejoined,
"Thou art too soft and gentle for such scenes;
Their toils and hardships thou couldst never bear.
Again, if thou wouldst patiently abide
In Cuba, better couldst thou lend me aid,
Should I, in sore distress, from northern shores
Appeal to thee for succor: thou couldst then
Command the ships I leave with thee, to haste
To my relief. But shouldst thou go with me,
And seek to aid me, powerless would prove
Thy faithful hands, though willing." When at last
She saw her pleas all fruitless, she exclaimed,

"Since thou must go, my good lord, linger not
In that grim wilderness. Dispatch thy work,
Fulfill thy mission, and return with speed."

"O, trust me!" I returned; "for when my task
Is ended, unto thee my feet shall haste.
And ever in my journey through those wilds,
Love, I shall count the days till I behold
Once more the heavenly beacon of thine eyes,
The haven of thine arms." Then, as of old,
We parted in a storm of sobs and tears,
But trusting at some sweet, though unknown time,
In tears of happiness to meet again.

At noontide of a lovely day, when Earth
Wore flowery garlands of the moon of May,
And wind and wave and sky were favoring,
We drew our hawsers in, and put to sea.
Nine vessels made our fleet,—five noble ships,
Two caravels, and two frail pinnaces.
Of soldiers and of sailors in our host
More than a thousand might be counted. Priests
And monks and friars likewise joined our band,
For where the feet of Spaniards ever tread
The Sword is still companioned by the Cross.
To meet and overawe the foresters,
Four hundred noble steeds were carried. All
The elements auspicious, soon we reached
The long Floridian strand; and there we cast
Our anchors in a wide-extended bay.⁴⁵

BOOK XVI

De Soto's Narrative continued—On the coast of Florida—The Flamingo Island—The finding of the fugitive, Nimble Foot—He tells of his mission from the Queen of Cofachiqui—He is treacherously attacked by the Chieftain, Vitachuco, and his two companions are murdered—He then makes his escape—He is befriended by Vasconcelos, and joins De Soto's band—The swamps of Florida—Crossing the morasses—Ambuscades of the natives—Discontent among the soldiers—They beg De Soto to return—He refuses—His argument with Gaytun, the royal treasurer—The plots of Vitachuco—The Battle of the Lakes—Vitachuco is captured—Combat with swimmers among the water lilies—Uprising of the captives—Vitachuco and his followers are slain.

UPON the shore, some wary savages
Ran here and there; or, hiding stealthily,
And peeping through the tangled boughs and vines,
They spied our ships at anchor like a flock
Of great white sea-fowl lifting monstrous wings:
Well knew we how that ominous sight they rued!

Fresh water being needed, there uprose
A hoary pilot, who in bygone years
Had sailed these waters, and he sought me, saying,
"Look out to sea: upon yon little isle
Dim in the distance, flow abundant springs,
With water sweet and clear." Heeding his words,
I took a pinnace with our water-casks,

And westward sailed. Only Vasconcelos
And a small crew were with me. In three hours
We reached the island; quickly there we brimmed
Our empty vessels. Further out to sea,
Still dim in distance, rose another isle,
A little speck upon the ocean waste.
Above it soared a swarm of water-fowl,
So far, a tiny cloud of gnats it seemed.
Then curious to explore this far-off key,
I pointed westward, to the oarsmen crying,
"Come, row me to yon little isle." With speed
Their oars they plied, obeying. Soon the sea
Grew rough and choppy, and our little boat
Bobbed upward and downward, like a tumbling
cork.

The Indians' frail canoes, I felt assured,
Not oft had dared to venture out so far,
And thus these birds of ocean built their nests
In safety from such depredating foes;
And so it proved: soon we descried aloft
Great lines of slim flamingoes cleave the air;
Then, thronged upon the island's further shore,
A legion treading peacefully we spied.

The beach we gained; behind a mangrove swamp
We moored the shallop, where it lay concealed.
The crew I left there, whispering, "Be ye still,
Nor dare to follow." With Vasconcelos
Slowly and stealthily I crept and crawled
Through the low stunted bushes. On the way,
An old deserted nesting-place we passed,—
A ruined city of the water-fowl:
Here many acres of a sandy field
Were crowded with their myriad cups of mud,

So thick they seemed one mighty honeycomb.
Each pigmy hillock, hollowed at the crest,
Reared like a tiny dead volcanic cone,
Forsaken, lifeless, left to barrenness.
We glided further; through we stole with care,
Alarmed, the birds rose in a countless flock.
Like subterranean thunder roared their flight,
And soon their deep, loud honking rent the air,
So that the angry swarming fowl we feared
Would swoop upon us with their wings and beaks,
And drive us in retreat; but still they rose
In circles ever upward to the heavens.
No sight more glorious ever met these eyes;
Of scarlet and vermilion fringed with fire,
Resplendent in the sunbeams, blazed that cloud,
A brilliant, burning sunset overhead.

Then, seeing that we moved not, reassured,
With clashing and with clapping of their wings
Down circled they again. We crept still nearer,
And, crouched beneath a wild fig's stunted boughs,
Upon them closely, unespied, we gazed.
We watched them wading in the shallow sea,
Or dabbling in the tiny pools on shore,
Or shambling awkwardly along the beach.
Glowing with crimson, flecked with black, their wings,
Their breasts were brilliant scarlet; those half-grown
Preened snowy plumage softly tinged with rose.
We saw the great white broken eggs, now hatched,
And marked the fluffy young chicks, creamy-downed,
Just then escaped from prison, new to life,
Slip from the nest, run with a whistling crow,
And take at once to swimming in the sea.
Their parents oft would force them back to shore,

Pecking them angrily to make them haste.
Vast flocks we noted, sitting patiently
On mud-built nests, or wading for their food,
One acting as the sentinel. Disturbed
When once I murmured, in a moment's time
The signal with a trumpet-cry he gave,
And instantly the flock took flight again,
First rising in a great triangle; soon
Grown bolder, all streamed back in single file:
So then we left them to their homes in peace.

As we returned, shunning the tangled boughs
Of dwarfish trees, an easier path we sought
Along the seashore. But we scarce had walked
A furlong's distance on the yellow sands
Fringing the blue waves, when, upon the beach
Before us, we espied an Indian youth
Stretched naked in the sun. Closed were his eyes,
As though he slumbered, or lay still in death.
Drawing still nearer, we perceived his eyes
Quiver a moment, while his flitting breath
Lifted the sharp ribs and the husk of skin
Over a bosom sturdy once and strong.
Still in young manhood, tall, and bearing yet
Traces of youthly comeliness, he lay
So worn and wasted that we looked to see
Each moment his dim, slender flame of life
Flicker and die. His cheeks were pale: his fine
Symmetric limbs, dwindled to gauntness, proved
Starvation, thirst and illness long endured.

Pillowing his head against a knoll of sand,
We chafed his hands, with water laved his brow,
And hoping that he still had power of speech,

We asked his name, his home, and whither bound?
He answered but with groans, opened his eyes
One moment, and then closed them wearily.
Our comrades at the distant boat we hailed,
Bidding them fetch us bread and meat and wine:
This done, the drink and food we offered him,
And though at first he shook his head, ere long
A little bread he tasted, then the wine,
And when an hour had passed, his wonted strength
Seemed half returned. Between the stalwart arms
Of two strong sailors held erect, he then
Limped with us to our shallop. Plying the oars,
Swiftly our seamen rowed us from the isle,
And ere the sun sank in the western waves,
Safely they brought us to our ship again.
Laid on the deck, and fed with tender meat
In savory little morsels, the young man
Regained his voice a little: slowly then,
With a bewildered air and faltering tongue
He told his story. In the Cuban isle,
A score of red men from these northern shores,
(By some adventurous mariner decoyed,
And sold to slavery in the South) had served
As menials at my palace. Carefully
Their language I had studied, and so now
The story of this castaway I heard
And understood, though oft his voice grew faint,
And oft I bade him speak his words again
To make his meaning clear. Thus then the youth:

“Far to the northeast, where the Seven Stars
Rise from the earth in Springtime skies at eve,
There lies a kingdom of this forest-world
Called Cofachiqui. A delightsome land,

By lofty mountains overbrowed, and veined
By noble rivers, never yet was realm
Lovelier to view. Thrice wealthy is this realm
In pearls,—in wondrous pearls of orient hues,
By the white men deemed priceless. This rich state
Is governed by a maiden young and fair,—
A maiden all men love.” Here the youth paused,
Sighing, as though his words more meaning bore
Than language might evince. But after a while
His history he resumed: “Born in that land,
There was it that I grew to manhood. Strong
In every limb, and cunning with my hands,
No warrior of the tribe was judged my peer.
So swift and sure my feet, whenever a hare
Or wolf or stag I hunted through the wilds,
Nor bow nor spear I took, but like the wind
Rushing in Springtime north from southern seas,
I chased my panting victim, till at last
I overtook him, clutched him, threw him down,
And held him fast. My fleetness known to fame,
Men called me Nimble Foot,—a name that seems
But mockery now, in this unjoyous plight!

“Once in the past, unto our country marched
A band of strangers,—white men from the isles
Beyond the southern seas. Their speech was yours,
And their commander,—Ayllon was his name,—
Was vested, armed and plumed like you, my lords.
These men, amazed to see our kingdom’s wealth
In marvelous pearls, soon laid their lawless hands
On the rich treasures of those lustrous gems
That through the past years in old fanes and tombs
Had lain un plundered. In marauding bands
The shrines they robbed, and mansions of the dead,

So that our people rose, and slew them all.
But after many moons had past, our queen
Attained the throne, and she, who oft had heard
In childhood of these wanderers from the south,
Devised a plan whereby to seek the shore
Whence they had sailed, and barter with our pearls
For the steel weapons and the silken garbs
Like those the strangers wore. Calling for me,
She bade me choose two comrades, and with these
Seek out the southern country, and endeavor
In peace and good will, at the white man's door
To make a treaty by whose terms her hopes
Might reach fruition. With a loyal heart
Obeying her, two faithful friends I chose,
And in a little while our feet we set
Upon the pathway south.

"For many days
Through the deep forest on we sped; the heights
We climbed, the brooks we leaped, and stately
streams
Swimming, we crossed. But hasting onward still,
Before the green grape on the woodland vine
Had changed to bloomy purple, we attained
A country not afar from where we stand,—
North hence a score of leagues. An ample realm,
Three brothers rule it, though the share of one
The tribe calls Vitachuco, many times
Is greatest of the three. This mightier chief,
Snaky of eye and black of countenance,
Ruling with harshest tyranny, hath made
The name of Vitachuco feared afar.
His black face wreathed in smiles to welcome us,
And though, instinctive, I mistrusted him,

Unwisely at his wigwam we abode
Through a short season. In a deerskin pouch
We had brought safely to this despot's lodge
A beamy store of pearls, whose wondrous worth
The red men of the south had learned to prize.
Incautious, we had shown him these, and though
Out of our treasury we had made him gifts
Of glorious gems, still with a greedy heart
He coveted all we bore.

"In depths of night,

When I and both my comrades lay asleep,
The Chieftain with a crew of miscreants
Fell on us: both my friends were slain, and I,
Riddled with many wounds, lay drenched in blood.
Seizing our pearls, they hastened from the lodge,
Not doubting that I too had perished, so
Their guilty secret never would be known.
But gathering all my puny strength still left,
I crawled away, crept through a tangled brake,
And reached a vast marsh. Through this oozy waste
All the next day I waded, floundering
In dark foul waters where the thick green scum
Plastered me over, and the bloated snakes,
Hissing, would lash me as they sped away.
At sunset I rejoiced to reach a wood
Above the fen, where I might sleep awhile,
Rest, and recast my future plans. Next day,
In spite of all my wounds I wandered on
To reach the kingdom's end. Left weaponless,
And crippled grievously, I could not hunt
Wild beasts or birds for food, but being skilled
In woodcraft, found wild berries, fruits and nuts
To ease my hunger. At the pebbled brooks

I quenched my thirst, and bathed my burning wounds.
I sought to gain the sea, and hitherward
For many weary days I straggled on.

“At last I reached the seashore: there I found
An old canoe, mossy and rent with holes,
Abandoned long before upon the sands.
With careful hands repairing it, in time
I ventured with it out to the open sea,
Yon closer isle first seeking. On its beach,
Legions of turtles laid their myriad eggs
In the warm sand. So, digging out the eggs,
And rubbing two sticks together for a fire
To cook them, I had plenteous wholesome food,
And soon my wonted strength returned.

“I hoped
Upon that spot to sight the white man’s bark,
Signal and board it, and, ere many days
Reaching the southern shores, though stripped of all
My treasures, yet contrive through other means
To lead your people to our realm, and make
A treaty with the leaders there. But scarce
Had ten days come and gone, when to that isle
The braves of Vitachuco plied their oars
In grim pursuit. Doubtless they long had sought
In vain to find me, but at last had traced
My footsteps to the seashore, and so now
In many swift canoes they speeded out
To reach my hiding-place. But ere they gained
That island, I deserted my old craft
For fear of their detection, and I leaped
Into the sea, swimming so that my head
Alone would rise above the vasty waves,

And even that the distance soon would hide
From every eye that scanned the deep. My foes
Spying me not, and fearing to row out
Further to sea upon their slim canoes,
Followed no more. So on that sandy isle,
Haunted by myriad sea-fowl, I was left
Safe from pursuit, yet a lone castaway.

"There on that barren strand, exiled afar
From every kindly face and voice of man,
The wild sea-fowl mine only company,
I lingered till six moons in the lone heavens
Had waxed and waned. At last, scorched in the heat
Of the fierce southern sun, feeding alone
On roots and barks and shellfish, and for drink
Seeking the brackish pools, a fever stole
Through all my burning veins. Then on the beach
I writhed and pitched and tossed, delirious,
And racked with fearful dreams. After long days
My fever had abated, yet I still
Lay helpless, weak from hunger and disease,
And waiting but for death. So thus it was
Ye came and found me."

Having heard the youth,
We pitied his unsplendored state, and all
Hastened as one man to uplift his heart
With words of welcome. Then Vasconcelos,
Most moved of any in that gathered throng,
Cried, "By my troth! It is a moving sight
To see one in his lusty youthhood thus
By some Satanic foe deprived of all
His glorious vigor. Hear me now, my lad:
Be my attendant, and my friend as well

From this day on, and thou shalt never rue
The trust thou placest in me." With these words
Our parle was ended: and from that same day,
Vasconcelos and the young man became,
Not master and servant, but in good sooth
Comrades in arms, and mates in heart and soul.

We disembarked at nightfall, and we slept
On the bare ground, under the forest trees.
Around us hurtled unfamiliar sounds;
The wolves went howling through the tangled swamps;
Hooting in hoarse and ghostly tones, the owls
Chilled our warm blood, or with keen shrilly cries
Made our hearts shiver in mysterious fear.
From dusky hollows of the solemn woods
The weird and melancholy whippoorwills
Enthralled us with their wild, insistent calls.
The older warriors heard the strange alarms,
Yet long accustomed to a soldier's couch
On tentless earth, with unknown perils round,
They crossed themselves, and soon were fast asleep.
But many lads amongst us, all unused
To such rude pillows in such haunted wilds,
Could sleep not; restlessly they tossed and turned
Till morning's tapers lit the eastern skies.

Soon were we started on our northward march,
And lost amid the gloomy wilderness,—
Plodding an hundred weary leagues before
We gained the highlands. All these toilsome days,
The same wild scenes in pensive loneliness
Environed us, unchanging, dusk or dawn.
From every marsh gigantic cypresses
Upsoared to heaven with verdant feathery boughs;

Magnolias, glossy green, hung spotless blooms
In moonlight splendor through the emerald shades;
Here pawpaws scattered their ambrosial sweets;
Here fronded palms upreared in kingly pride.
The live-oaks, with their long gray shaggy moss,
Seemed graybeard priests upon the Norland shores,
Gazing on solemn wastes of Norland seas.
Stupendous grape-vines in titanic coils
Weighed down colossal trees, and trailed below
Great curtains of their quivering, heart-shaped leaves.
Dangling in clusters from inflected boughs,
Purple wistarias glowed; in brilliant wreaths
The scarlet trumpet-flowers flamed; sweet sprays
Of creamy blooms the honeysuckles twined,
While passion-flowers wove their azure lace,
And swung their fragrant green and yellow globes.

Along the streams were canebrakes deep and dark,
Where man in vain might seek to struggle through.
Thick mazes of the poison-ivy clung
To throw one headlong. On the lonely trails
For bridges there were giant fallen trees,
Each end half hidden in prodigious ferns.
On gloomy lakes pure water-lilies spread
Great archipelagoes of starry blooms.
Here monstrous alligators sprawled and sunned,
On rotting logs enormous turtles dozed,
Huge moccasins, puffed up with venom, crawled,
And rattlesnakes in frightful coils upreared.
Blue herons waded in the lonely tarns,
And spectre-like, through melancholy shades
The milk-white tufted egrets fluttered by.
Bears wandered through the creeper-tangled shrubs:
The swift young hart sped like a startling dream:

Wild turkeys clucked and cluttered: stealthily
On silken feet the panther crept: the swift
Young otters dived and swam in reedy pools,
Or slid down sloping river-banks in play.

Eagerly we searched the country many moons
For traces of gold or silver, but no gleam
Of either shining metal from that soil
Gladdened us. Meanwhile, as we vainly sought
For treasure, we were forced on scantiest fare
Our hunger to appease. The cabbage palms
Their coronals of tender fronds upreared,
Delicious morsels; but the trees would perish
With their young buds dissevered from the crest.
The famished soldiers waded brooks and ponds
For water-cresses: in deserted huts
Whose habitants had fled, at times they found
Dried chestnuts, grapes or plums. In villages
Or fields abandoned by their savage lords,
A little maize we found. When ripe, the grain
With pestles and with mortars hewn of wood,
The soldiers pounded; then through coats of mail
The meal they sifted; next, the bread they baked
Over hot coals in pots of earthenware.
The tender unripe ears upon the cob
We roasted; and a more luscious feast they made
For the voracious mouths of hungry men,
Than cates of demigods!

Throughout those wilds
Game wandered multitudinous,—in flight,
Swimming or creeping; flood and forest teemed
With every shape of fish or beast or bird.
They seemed to taunt and dare us; for the life

Of the huntsman here in greater peril hung
Than the lives of those he hunted; if he strayed
But half a league, never would he return,
And never would a whisper tell us how,
Or when, or where, our comrade met his doom.
The natives fished, or boisterous in the hunt,
Would rouse the woods with shouts: but every knight
Outwandered as a sportsman, they would slay.
For these ferocious northern savages
Differed from all the meek unwarlike tribes
Under the sweet and soft Peruvian skies,
As the bold eagle differs from the wren,
As the bloodthirsty panther from the hare,
Or the fierce tiger from the trembling fawn.

When starting for the north I left behind
Stout Pedro Calderon, the post to guard
With infantry and horse. We had not marched
A bare day's journey, when a great morass
Scowled just before us. Nigh three leagues in
breadth,
How could we cross it? Still, we boldly plunged
Forward, as though we charged an enemy.
Great oozy fields, tufted with waving grass,
Would quake beneath us, sink and give away,
So that we floundered in a sea of mire.
Dismayed, but stumbling, sprawling blindly on,
Smeared casque to sabbaton in watery sludge,
We reached a great lagoon; my scouts I sent
To search the canebrakes for some trail around.
None was discovered: so two days we toiled
To fashion rafts: these finished, with their aid,
Exulting, we attained the shores beyond,
Thanking our saints for labors at an end.

Vain joy! Another marsh before our feet
Far vaster, reeked with fens impassable.
In blank amaze I overlooked its bogs,
Its sluggish tarns, green-mantled with their scum,
Its pathless canebrakes and its treacherous quags.
So, mounting my steed, I wandered with the scouts
To find a path around: above three days
We sought in vain. Our crafty Indian guides
Deceived us, often leading us astray.
Two natives whom we captured in the wilds
And forced to act as guides, proved likewise false,
Luring us nigh to deadly ambuscades.
From swamps concealing them, the savages
Would speed their arrows at us passing by,
Or rush upon us from the marshes' reeds
With storms of javelins. Every brake became
A nest of hornets: every thicket swarmed
With angry foes of myriad stings. Our hands
Could never smite them, for they crouched from view,
Or darted quickly forth and hid again.
At every nightfall, shrieking hordes would gather,
Goading, tormenting, maddening us, till sleep
Fled frightened from our eyes. Many brave knights
Their fang-like arrows wounded, and still others
Their lances reached and slew.

At last we found
The limit of the marshes, and in joy
Sent for our comrades left behind. When they
Rejoined us, we marched on. But soon we found
The pathway by a deep, swift river barred.
Yet not for long we paused. Our sturdy lads
Stripped naked; steeped in water to their chins,
They waded on, their vestments and their arms

Heaped high in safety on their heads, and so,
Without one loss, they gained the farther strand.

My men, discouraged, faint and sick of heart,
Began to murmur bitterly: no gold
Had yet rewarded us: our meagre fare
Scarcely beat back the wolf of hunger: Death,
Of hideous aspect, of unearthly form,
Stalked by in freezing horror. Every day
Greater the perils, needs more clamorous!
Mine own heart, worn with grief and doubt and care,
From unseen terrors in dismay recoiled:
Of ills awaiting us I dared not think,
But mine eyes I shut and my fists I clenched,
Swearing, as I had sworn in far-off Spain,
To march to El Dorado, or to die.
So then my ships I planned to send away,
To smother at their birth the hopes of those
Who hourly begged me to return. When first
The soldiers learned our vessels would depart,
They cried, "This land is barren; not one trace
Of gold or silver cheers us. Let us turn,
And leave this savage, gloomy waste forever."
"No, I will not!" I answered. "Be ye still.
No coward am I, thus to turn and flee
When trivial difficulties dog my path.
Privations sterner far have I endured,
And perils faced that prove these perils tame."

"But," said Lobillo, "in this wilderness
That frowns before us, multitudinous,
The savages await us; every swamp
Will be a haunt for ambushade; each nook
And hollow will conceal its deadly snare,

Ready to snatch us to some frightful doom."
Then I: "But duty bids me onward: never
That Inward Voice my soul shall disobey.
The pagan multitudes my breast may chill
With terror; but that silent Voice I fear
More than the warlike cry of savage braves.
When recreant to its trust my spirit proves,
Hostile battalions though I dare defy,
I dare not face to face confront myself."
Then Nuño de Tobar: "Bethink thee well!
Too late it soon may be to choose retreat:
Now, while we may, our error should we own,
And homeward turn again." But I rejoined,
"We have not yet been conquered: why kneel down
In subjugation ere our overthrow?
O, rather let us make impossible
All base thoughts of retreat. Despite the crimes
Of ruthless Cortez, in my soul of souls
I thank him for one lesson from his life:
To keep the pathway forward, swerving not,
Though legions rise against me, and with hand
Unfaltering fire the ships that aid retreat."

Juan Gaytun then, the royal treasurer,
Surly and insolent, protested still:
"Sir, why despise our counsels? Well we know
This glittering dream has long possessed you: yet
Your aspirations, as your eyes must see,
Never can reach fruition: surely all
Are doomed to failure. Then why not confess
Your blunder, and reform your plans? When once
Man finds himself misled and turned astray
By false ideals of his callow youth,
Let him succumb, renouncing hopes too high,

And bowing his head to fates inexorable."
But I: "True; I have aspirations born
Of youthful zeal; ideals, hopes and dreams,
Implanted in my bosom at my birth:
Age shall not stunt them, Fate shall not destroy!
To the laws of his own nature let each man
Be steadfast. Gaytun, thou hast lived to see
Thine own ideals murdered; but think not
To see mine likewise perish! Write thou not
My code of duty: still shall I be true
To nobler precepts than thy statutes teach,—
Precepts that Nature gave me with my breath.
The acorn in the darksome earth has dreams,—
The far-off call to be an oak, it hears!
Grass it shall never be, nor flower, nor fern,
Nor yet a clinging vine: God's voice it heeds,
True to its Being's laws. And it shall rise
With girth prodigious; blest with lofty boughs,
Those many-forking branches shall be haunts
Wherein the mocking-bird and thrush may sing.
The kingly eagle in those hoary arms
Shall rest his eyrie, and shall rear his young:
Within those grateful shades at burning noon
Shall flocks and herds in pastoral ease repose.
Green mosses at the forest-monarch's feet
Shall soothe the shepherd-boy to sleep: on high
He shall uplift his leafy coronals,
Friend of the clouds, and comrade of the skies!

"Thus, Gaytun, is that tree still true to laws
Of its own nature; and thus I shall be
To laws of mine: seek not to swerve me from them."

So answering those who sought to turn my course,
All of our barks save three I sent away.

The men scowled, or they murmured in despair
When the fleet sailed and left them there behind.

We reached Ocali;⁴⁶ here we saw a town,
Largest of all in realms Floridian, where
Six hundred palm-thatched wooden huts arose
Among fat fields verdant with Indian corn.
Deserted was the village; not one man,
Woman or child, our eyes beheld. Naught else
The dreary loneliness relieved, beside
One lean, dejected solitary cur,
Shamefaced and stealthy-eyed, with downcast head,
And a limp tail that dangled twixt his legs,
Slinking away, yet glancing back anon
Over his skinny shoulders furtively
To scan the unwelcome interlopers there.
Entering, we made the town our home a while,
Enjoying some brief rest, and richly fed
On green corn, sweet and savory, from the fields.

Now the vast forest offered interludes
Of smooth savannahs, flower-sprinkled meads;
Great grassy plains of pale and tender green
Spread palpitating in the golden light.
Here twined and thridded pure cerulean streams,
Where floated yellow lilies; on their slopes
Arose the iris, daughter of the rills,
Discovering through her violet-tinted veins
The heavenly hue of fountains whence she came.
Like azure isles in seas of softest green,
Were dark blue lakes: and bordering on the plains,
Uprose the sombre wilderness sublime,
With clumps of trees that boldly jugged out
Like headlands of a lofty continent.

Cropping the sward, or quaffing at the brooks,
Through the soft verdure of those gentle scenes
Wandered great herds of red and mottled deer.⁴⁷
King of the Vega, roamed the antlered stag,
With soft-eyed mates that loved his lofty mein;
These, trusting to his guidance, feared no foe
Amid the calmness of that rural seat,
Till he would give the signal; then, alert,
Their ears would prick: their nostrils sniff the
breeze:

Their eyes would flash; their limbs grow tremulous;
Then, swifter than the swiftest javelin,
The whole wild herd at once would speed away.

Now we approached that country of Three Kings,
Where Vitachuco, eldest of the three,
Had fallen at night on Nimble Foot, had slain
His comrades, stolen his pearls, and left the youth
Half dead among the dead. The two young Kings
Besought our friendship, and sent messengers
To Vitachuco, begging him to yield
His good will to us likewise. He replied,
"I spurn the hand they offer. Tell these rogues
Never to sneak one step within my bounds,
For if they come, none shall escape my wrath."
Still, not contented, every day he sent
His heralds to my tent-door, blowing horns,
And crying, "If ye pale-faced brigands dare
Set foot in my dominions, I will bid
The mountains fall upon you; make winds hurl
Uprooted trees upon you; I will send
Great birds of prey with venom in their beaks
To tear your flesh, and leave it festering
In foul corruption; yea, the very air,

The grass and water, I will poison, so
There breathes no man amongst you but must die."

All these wild threats I treated with disdain,
Standing prepared to march beyond his line
Whether he gave assent or no. But soon,
His brothers interceding once again,
His haughty airs he tempered. By and by
He to his brethren said: "My wrath is cooled;
Peace I desire, and peace will I extend
Unto the stranger. Say to him for me,
That on the morrow, with my chosen braves
I come to visit him, and grasp his hand
In friendship, as my brothers have before."
In truth, he meditated treachery;
Gathering his warriors,—they were numberless,—
"Arm ye, and stand in readiness," he said,
"So when amidst the field I walk beside
The strangers' leader, I will raise a shout,
And that will be the signal for the death
Of all the white marauders. At that cry,
Pounce ye upon their ranks, my trusty braves,
And smite and cleave and slaughter ruthlessly,
So all shall perish ere one hour is over."
But loudly boastful, of his stratagem
He blabbed to friendly natives; these divulged
The frightful secret; so I then resolved
To carry out the grim jest earnestly,
With a sequel unexpected on his part.
That night my lads like tortoises I sheathed
In armor that concealed them, breast and limb:
All were prepared to fight,—tooth, nail and fist,—
To slash, to smite and pound the pagan horde
Flat underfoot. And so we stood alert

When on the morrow Vitachuco came
And called me forth to view his marshaled braves.

Black was the visage of the fierce cacique.
With blood-shot eyes, with ponderous low-hung jaws,
With shaggy locks of coarse and grizzled hair,
Hands like a vulture's claws, nose like its beak,
A raucous voice that drowned a wild beast's roar,
Repulsion and abhorrence he inspired.
A bamboo sceptre, tufted with the plumes
Of parrots, brilliant yellow, red and green,
Playfully he twirled. Round his dusky neck,
In lustrous moonwhite coils were hung the pearls
Of Cofachiqui: fumbling through the gems
With black and snaky fingers, oft he smiled,
And bowed his head in deference when I spoke.
And yet his glance was furtive; treachery
Lurked in his laugh; the dark malevolence
That coiled, a deadly serpent, in his soul,
No art could hide. His new-made covenant,
As fragile as a shedded viper-skin,
Even now he planned to cast aside. "My lord,
I bid thee welcome," Vitachuco growled;
"Long have I sought to know thee: now at last
I thank the Great Spirit that my hope comes true."
Curtly I answered, "Likewise am I pleased,
Redoubted chief, to meet thee face to face."
My hand he wrung; he smiled a cynic smile,
And gazing on me keenly, head to foot,
For shroud and coffin seemed to measure me.

Twelve warriors stood beside the churl, and so
Twelve knights myself I called to be my guard.
A page came also, leading on my steed:

And creeping on behind me stealthily,
As silent and as shadowy as the form
Of Fate, stole Nimble Foot, eager to seize
And drag his hated Judas to account.
Seeing him not, though marking all the rest,
The chieftain winced, then muttered, "It is well,
Sir Knight, that friends accompany thee." But now
I added, "Chief, as thou hast brought this morn
Thy warriors in review before me, I
Mine own troops in embattled ranks will show."
Again he winced,—he hesitated,—paused,
And then assented, mumbling, "Let them come."

Upon a broad and level field we stood.
On one hand gleamed two lakes⁴⁸ with silvern waves:
One mere was long and narrow, while the other
Curved like an oval mirror, where the gods,
Down-bending from cerulean heights of heaven,
Might greet their own resplendent visages.
Upon the other hand, dark, deep and wild,
A forest rose. Here immemorial glooms
In dim and holy solitudes profound
Had haunt and sanctuary, unprofaned
By sacrilegious eye. No sound of axe
Those solemn shades had cleaved like blasphemy,
To rouse primeval sylvan deities,
The guardian spirits of those ancient woods.

The sons of Spain drew up behind us, each
In armor, bearing sword and arquebuse,
Some mounted, some on foot. But I forgot
Mine own battalions, as in deep dismay
And apprehension, on the multitudes
Of foresters I gazed. A sight superb

Those dusky warriors made! Erect they stood,
Like splendid copper statues, frankly nude,
With rounded limbs, with shapely hands and feet,
Spears on their shoulders, plumes upon their brows.
Thousands they numbered: as for our poor band,
How puny seemed it in comparison!
The chief and I, each with our chosen twelve,
Walked out between the armies. Suddenly
My watchful ears heard, dull and ominous,
From savage throngs, like the buzz of angry bees,
Tumultuous murmurings. I waited not,
But raised my hand; like witchcraft, instantly
A clarion sounded for our lads to charge.
Ah, not too soon one moment! For the chief
At my first movement raised a mighty shout,
A wild, blood-curdling whoop, that sped for miles
Over the lakes and over that great plain,
And echoed and re-echoed thrillingly
Throughout those ancient woodland solitudes,
Like the last battle-cry of Satan, raised
At Armageddon, when his bannered host
Makes its last rally against the power of God.

Hearing that war-cry, every Indian brave
Answered with other cries, till all the world,
And all the heavens themselves, seemed in affright
To reel and shudder. Onward rushed the throngs
Of savages to smite us. But as soon
As Vitachuco sought to lift his hand
Against us, Nimble Foot came rushing up
Behind him, and in scarcely half a breath
Pinioned him in his strong and sinewy arms
As safely as in manacles of steel.
And as a panther in the strangling coils

Of a great python tosses, leaps and bounds,
And strives and struggles, seeking frantically,
But ever vainly, to escape, so now
Black Vitachuco madly pitched and plunged,
In desperation seeking to escape,
But vainly. When I saw him safely held,
I mounted on my horse, (that stamped and neighed,
As red and wild as red wild morns of March,
Impatient for the conflict's fearful joy,)
And galloped on the dusky forest-knights
Speeding to rescue their downfallen King.

In thunder roars each deadly arquebuse,
And pagan after pagan, reels and falls;
But still undaunted, lifting frightful whoops,
And flourishing spears and clubs and tomahawks,
We see them coming with terrific might.
Now hiss their angry darts; now snarl their slings;
Like winter winds their flying javelins
Whine round us; then, a furious hurricane,
Shocks on our line that host of savages.
Our horsemen dash against them, sword in hand,
And smite them like avenging gods from heaven.
Flint arrows clink on armor, splintered; spears
Are shattered harmless on unbending steel.
On helmet, targe or corselet smites in rage
The murderous tomahawk, but smites in vain,
Bounding deflected from its iron prey.
Bravely they dash on, but we sweep them down,
With deadly volleys, thrusts of tempered blades.
Our falchions glitter; swift the steely brands
Cleave through tough shields of alligator hide,
And pierce the breasts they cover. Now, alas!
Riddled with darts, my gallant charger falls,

Still proudly neighing; soon he breathes his last.
Another steed I mount, and fight them still.

The crash and crack and roar of musketry
Arouse such echoes in that forest old
As never, since the world itself began,
Its peace have murdered. From the lakes upsoar
Vast flocks of startled waterfowl: on high,
Wild geese and mallards, snowy swans and cranes,
Whirl round in terror as hoarse-throated guns
Like fiery dragons bellow. In dismay
The fish-hawk drops his fish; his tyrant foe,
The eagle, poised above him in the act
Of robbery, lets their scaly victim fall
Back to the pool in safety, and in flight
Seeks refuge from the frightful hell below.

The Indians, seeing Vitachuco snared,
Yet stripped of all power to recapture him,
Fled from the field, by cavalry pursued.
Some plunged within the long lake, and escaped:
Another legion sought the oval mere,
Only to find themselves surrounded there
By our swift horsemen. Into this round lake
Our eager troopers urged their snorting barbs,
But finding the waters far beyond their depth,
All were soon forced to struggle back. Throughout
That livelong day, the fugitives swam round
Beyond the reach of horseman or of horse.
With ease we might have slain them; still, we chose
To spare them, though they once in treachery
Had sought our own lives. From the lakelet's marge
We hallooed, "Come! Surrender!" But they hurled
Their answer in defiance and disdain,

Yelling, "Begone, ye dogs! We yield ourselves
To none but God!" Nor did they cease to fight:
For though the water was too deep to yield
A place to stand on, three or four stout braves
Would swim together closely; on their backs,
As on a floating human raft, another
Would stand and aim his arrows at our band.

Night fell, and still around the pool they swam.
A multitude of water-lilies thronged
The shallow margins, or in snowy isles
Adorned the lakelet's bosom. Through the gloom
They glimmered in their milk-white galaxies,
Making dark waters like sublunar skies
With the dim radiance of down-fallen stars.
The wary Indians, swimming stealthily
Amid the hosts of lily-pads and blooms,
Now sought to creep in safety to the shore.
Ghostlike and silent, reaching for the strand,
To hide their heads from sharp Castilian eyes,
Some bore the leaves and blossoms in their mouths;
These we detected, and repulsed with darts.
So then, concealed in blossoms and in leaves,
They twanged their arrows at our sentinels:
Keenly we eyed them; when a lily moved,
Our archers aimed their crossbows at the spot.
And yet the braves ceased not their barbs to fling,
Till every quiver hung in emptiness.
Night dappled into dawn; the human shoal
Still floated, though the weary swimmers lay
Like moveless corpses, numb and wan with cold.

A fortnight ere this time, our men had found
My comrade, Ortiz, in these wilds. So now,

As he well knew the language of this tribe,
He sought the margin of the lake, and called,
"Come out! Fear not; for we will spare your
lives."

So presently, surrendering one by one,
They swam ashore. Their fears again we calmed,
Saying, "Be not afraid; for we esteem
Your hardihood and courage: none of you
Shall suffer death." Despite these promises,
Twelve stalwart braves, more stubborn than the
rest,

Still paddled round, refusing to be taken.
Twelve Indian slaves we sent to drag them out;
These swam beside them, seized them by the hair,
And brought them, gasping, chilled, and cramped in
limb,

Yet struggling, to the shore. These last to come
Had floated round for thirty weary hours,⁴⁹
Not resting hand or foot on solid ground.

Sparing their lives, as serfs we made them toil,
Resolved, when past their realm, to free them. Still,
Black Vitachuco thirsted for our blood.
Though not condemned to labor,—ever called
To sit beside me as a favored guest
Whenever bread was broken,—nursing hate,
A great uprising of his braves he planned.
For many days he plotted: when at last
He stood in readiness to strike the blow,
Meeting his leaders in a lonely wood
Beyond our camp-ground, at the midnight hour,
"My warriors!" cried he, "When the noontide comes
To-morrow, and I sit at meat with those
Who hold me captive, I will rise, and lift

Such a great shout that all of you shall hear,
Whereat each man amongst you shall strike down
The one who domineers him as his lord.
With mine own hands their leader will I clutch,
And strangle till he dies. O, how I long
To feel these fingers gripped upon his throat!
Stand ye in readiness, and fail me not!"

The time came; at our board the chieftain raised
A terrifying shout; quickly he came
Rushing upon me; in his giant arms,
Like monster serpent coils, he sought to crush
My body in a terrible embrace.
Slowly he choked and strangled me; with pain
I gasped for breath; my head swam round; mine
 eyes
Bulged from their sockets, and my swollen tongue
Thrust rigid from wide-opened jaws; the veins
Upon my neck seemed bursting, gorged with blood
Under his grip of steel. But desperately,
With a last frantic effort, I wrenched out
My right hand from his clutch: my sword I seized,
And drove it through his wild, ferocious heart.
Then through his giant frame the forest lord
Shuddered; his throttling serpentine embrace
Slowly relaxed; his iron arms and hands
Trembled; his eyes uprolled; blood gushed
Out of his mouth, and with a muffled groan
He bent and swayed, then toppled over, dead.

The other natives, at the signal given,
Rose on their masters. Armed with stolen pikes,
With hatchets, cutlasses, or iron bars,
Sorely they chastised many a Spanish knight.

But soon the Iberians, realizing all,
Assailed them with their battle-axes, swords,
And carbines,—whatsoever stood in reach.
They felled the mutineers by tens and scores,
And even hundreds, till but few survived
To kindle memories of their desperate plot.

BOOK XVII

De Soto's Narrative continued—Nimble Foot induces De Soto to march toward Cofachiqui—The province of Apalachee—The passage of the Great Swamp—Fearful conflicts with the natives—The adventures of Anasco and his companions—The treacherous guide—Discovery of Apalachee Bay—The highlands are attained—The coming of Autumn—Anasco is dispatched on another perilous journey, to the South—The night ride through the wilderness—Discovery of another, and finer, harbor—Maldonado and Calderon are sent to Cuba, with orders to return to the newly-discovered bay in the following Autumn—Starvation among the troops—Return of Spring—Lands of plenty—The strawberry plains—Approaching the province of Cofachiqui—The bathing girls—Alonzo and his companions surprise them—They tell De Soto of the approach of the Queen.

FOR many days had Nimble Foot beseeched
That we should march to Cofachiqui, where,
He oft averred, we should behold a land
Wealthy beyond all dreams in lustrous pearls,
And still more wealthy in its fertile plains,
Its noble forests and its stately streams.
So, hearkening to his wishes, North and East
We fared with hopeful hearts, though weary moons
Faded in heaven before our goal we won.
The land of Apalachee first we reached,
And there we faced more trying ills than ever
Had plagued our steps in by-gone days. For now
Another swamp we crossed,⁵⁰ a dismal wild,

By which all others we had braved before
Would seem but tiny brakes that fringed the rills
We waded in our barefoot childhood hours.
Here mammoth trees made never-ending night;
So close together stood their trunks, the path
Often admitted not two men abreast,
And made even one man toil to struggle through.
And there were watery meadows, where one step
Would set the earth a-quiver, and engulf
The lightest-footed lad in bubbling mire.
Round and above us, wreathed on rotting limbs,
Stared venomed serpents: by the dim lagoons,
Through palls of mournful cypresses, we heard
The loon and bittern, whose uncanny tones
Would simulate the wails of mourners raised
Above the dead, or more uncanny still,
Demoniac laughter from a madman's cell.
Oft was the trail enmeshed in tangled vines,
Or lost in canebrakes; so a path we cleared
With axe and hatchet, slowly, toilsomely.
Sharp brambles twined and twisted; vicious thorns
Would rip our garments, stain our flesh with blood.

And yet with all its toils, we would have faced
The Great Swamp, never murmuring to the end,
Had not the fierce barbarians harried us
With endless ambuscades and stratagems.
In one wood where they met us, like a snake,
The narrow path wound on through huddled trees:
So, interlocking shields, two men in front
Marched onward, while their comrades followed close
Behind them, in like fashion, two by two,
With crossbows and with muskets which they aimed
Over the heads of comrades in the lead,

And straight against the Indians massed to block
The pathway forward. Fighting all the way,
Backward we forced the red men, step by step,
Well-nigh a league, until we reached a river,
Beyond whose further marge, scowling, upreared
A steepy barricade of logs. Ere long,
Ferocious grew the battle at this stream;
Wading in water to our very arms,
Little the chance was for our hands to ply
The swords whirled overhead; our carabines,
Upheld to save their powder from the flood,
Reared useless for the want of steady aim.
But still we floundered through the river's depths,
The archers thronged upon the further shores
Finding us easy marks. But shallower grown
As we approached the further strand, the waves
No longer thwarted us. Here, taking aim
In coolness and in carefulness, we fired,
Sweeping great throngs to death. Though plagued
with darts
Hailed thick and hard and fast, the other shore
We mounted: there we stormed the barricade,
And put its fierce defenders to the sword.

We struggled through the Great Swamp's gloomy
shades,
Its sullen depths, its frowning fastnesses,
Its mournful covers, melancholy wilds.
We waded stagnant sloughs and sluggish pools,
We tripped on tangled creepers, slashed through
briars,
We stumbled over twisted roots, and logs,
On knotted cypress-knees we slipped and fell.

Often gigantic turtles strewed in lines
The banks of green bayous. As with closed eyes
They crouched there, half asleep, our men would rush
Suddenly upon them, hurl them on their backs,
And as they sprawled in helplessness, would slay
The monsters, to become our welcome fare.

At length, the dark and solemn shadows past,
Kind Heaven we thanked for good high level ground.
The Indians fought us not as in the past,
But like fierce panthers, through the weary nights,
Whooping and yelling from the neighboring woods,
They vexed and maddened us with false alarms.
Oft, as we rested, lapped in peace and calm,—
Dreaming in quiet underneath the stars,—
Some prowler's cry would lift, wrecking our sleep,
Stabbing the holy silence of the hour,
And making us roll, unrestful, till the dawn.

But not for lack of courage did those foes
An open fight evade. Their one intent
Was now with petty ills to weary us,
Till Nature, outworn, should compel the band,
From sheer exhaustion, to retreat. Nay, nay!
No foes they feared, those pagans! Nakedly,
With only barbs and bows, they stood unmoved
Before strong men in armor, foaming steeds,
Or deadly muskets vomiting their flames.
True patriots they! For never knightly Moor,
Norman nor Saxon, Roman, Greek nor Gaul,
Fought for his hearth with such a holy zeal.
To starve my legions, these wild foresters
Laid all their fields in waste; and oftentimes,
Rather than see their homes fall in our hands,

They gave them to the torch;⁵¹ so night by night,
Their blazing wigwams lit the startled skies.

I sent Anasco forth, to find a bay
More northernly, wherein to moor the ships
Left in the port where first our sails we furled.
For thirty gloomy leagues he and his band
Tramped swamp and canebrake. Then they reached
a marsh

Where one might hear the murmuring ocean-tides
Beat on the shore a scant half-league away.
Thrice did they hear the billows of the sea
Break on the beach anear them, but their guide,
A sullen savage, led them wrong. Each time
They sought to cross the marsh and gain the sea,
Through briery swamps he led them, tangled wilds,
Dense thickets, and to oozy fens and quags.

Anasco's men, infuriate, sought his life;
But having no other guide, the wretch they spared
With many a solemn warning. Yet again,
When the night fell, and the band lay in sleep,
The Indian snatched a firebrand, smote a guard,
And sought to slay him: being quelled in time,
And sore belabored for this deed, he yet
Attacked another guard when chance was given.
Once more his life was spared, and once again
He sought to slay a Spaniard. A huge hound
Who sought to seize him, died beneath his blows.
A wild, blood-thirsty maniac, in his wrath
He yelled, "Ye pale-faced cowards, pale with fear,
The blood within your veins runs white, not red!
Ye dare not fight me!" So the men of Spain
Rushed on him with their swords, and pierced him
through.

Another Indian guide revealed a trail
Whereby the seashore easily they gained.
They found a noble harbor; this they called
The Bay of Apalachee. Here it was
Narvaez once had toiled to build his fleet.
A ruined forge they saw; there, scattered round,
Were bones of horses,—relics of the days
When famished wretches slew their steeds for food,—
And there a punctured horse-skin bellows stood,
With wooden troughs, and ashes. On the trees
Rude crosses had been carved in mute appeal,—
Ah, sad reminder, warning darkly given,
Of pangs awaiting us in days to come!
Anasco raised more crosses, and on boughs
Of topmost trees hung signals; upon these
Were graven messages to all whose feet
Might tread those wilds, telling where lay our
camp,
What paths to take, what dangers to avoid,
And whatsoever might afford them aid.
This done, rejoining us, his force returned.

Now we had reached the highlands, where we found
Soft nooks of ease and luxury. In the woods,
The hickory-trees, pecans and walnuts strewed
Their nuts beneath them: the persimmon boughs
Scattered in wild profusion sugared fruit.
Freely bestowed by friendly savage lords,
Great cornfields, yellowing in October suns,
Supplied us with a wealth of golden ears.
In purple clusters, wild grapes overhead
Dangled profusely: trailing through the fields,
The wild-peas twined with many-podded beans,
While on luxuriant vines swelled everywhere

The golden-bellied pumpkins,—to our lips
More sweet than apples of Hesperides!

We saw the Indian Summer on the hills,
Where pale white hazes dimmed cerulean blue,
And blended tints celestial with terrene.
We viewed the red woods and the yellowing grass,
And saw in mellow sunshine, honey-hued,
Black velvet butterflies with spots of gold.
The crickets chirping in the fields we heard,
We marked the birds of passage flying south,
And lolling there lazy in the ripe, warm light,
We pitied the insects for their restless cries,
And birds of passage for their restless flight!

Here galaxies of starry asters thronged
And twinkled on the hills, while swung below
Convolvulus corollas blue as heaven.
Here Autumn stood like Ruth in harvest fields,
The Indian corn about her, in her hair
A wreath of glossy, red-globed muscadine,
And sprays of azure gentians in her hands.
And here she lingered, ere her exile came,
With melancholy beauty in her eyes,
Regretting to forsake her haunts of dream,
But prescient that the Winter hovered near,
To end the golden ages of her reign.

I now determined, ere the snow-moon rose,
To send mine orders unto Calderon,
Commanding him to man one caravel,
And bound it for Havana, bearing news
Of our adventures unto Isabel,
Then bring the rest to Apalachee Bay.

Fearful had been the task to come thus far,
But still more fearful would the journey be
Back by the same dread highway overpast,
Through the old dismal battle-fields, where now
The fierce barbarians, roused to tenfold ire
By the hot conflicts of our northward march,
Roved on the war-path, thirsting for our blood.
An hundred leagues that highway ran: in each,
Behind a treacherous pitfall or a snare
Death crouched expectant. For this heavy task
A valiant knight was needed,—most of all,
One of discretion and of wariness,—
No reckless blade my purposes could serve.
Anasco was that man. I bade him choose
From out my boldest, nine-and-twenty knights
To be his comrades in the perilous ride.
His cavaliers he chose; among the rest
Was Gomez Arias, bravest, yet discreetest.
Bearing my greetings, counsels and commands,
A letter unto Isabel I wrote,
And gave it with my blessing to the band.

They went with lightest armor, that their steeds
Might not be overweighted, and they took
The scantiest food that nature might demand.
Chiefly at night they rode, and in the day
They crept to woodland covers, where they slept.
Zealous in duty, eagerly their steeds
Devoured the distance. Seeking to evade
The savages, their leader bade them ride
By devious trails round all the villages
Along the way, or in deep midnight hours
Gallop straight through while all the townsmen
slept.

Weird is that night-ride through the wilderness
 Before their time by steeds of man untrod.
 What unknown terrors lurk in solemn shades,
 The real or unreal, false or true!
 Like spectral canopies in enchanted halls,
 The tattered moss swings down from gloomy boughs;
 Each black and rugged bole of ancient oak
 Becomes a demon to dispute the way;
 Each dead, decaying trunk becomes a ghost
 Looming gigantic. Dim, benighted wolds,
 Barrens and tangled brakes, the mournful haunts
 Of wild, unhappy whippoorwills, become
 Retreats unblest of wizard or of witch,
 Wherein to quaff the blood of slaughtered babes.
 The goblin owl with horror chills their veins,
 Dissembling cries of murder, or screams for help
 Rising at midnight from a haunted house.
 The panther with his shrill carnivorous yell
 Hurls mad defiance at the howling wolves:
 Like dragons of some bygone monster-age,
 The alligators bellow from their fens.
 The lynx's keen and lacerating whine
 Pierces the heart like the thin, plaintive sobs
 And whimperings of a slowly-strangling child.
 Above them hangs the wan and wasted moon,
 Red, frail and slender, like a scimitar
 Worn threadlike by the headsman's ruthless arm.

They feared the Great Swamp, where, should once
 they meet
 The Paynim in its narrow tortuous trail,
 No strength nor skill might save them. But no foe
 Stood in the way, that fearful pass to guard,
 And overjoyed, the farther side they gained.

Three rivers, passed in coming, one by one
They reached, and having swam them safely over,
They neared the plain, where two brief moons before,
The Chieftain Vitachuco and his braves
Against us twice had battled. They resolved,
Long ere that spot they reached, to pass at night,
And should they meet with prowling foresters,
Heedless of insults, calls or challenges,
To gallop on, returning not one volley.
But as they clattered through the field of death,
No foeman's trace they saw but mouldering skulls,
And whitened bones: and here and there uploomed
Black rotting wigwams, where foul beasts of prey,
Leaving their horrid feast on dead men's bones,
Would scamper for refuge, and with flaming eyes
Of green and yellow from the ruins glare.

Two Indians, hunting, met them: one uprose
So close before them with a bended bow,
They slew him in their own defence. The next
Upstarted, menacing likewise, in their path,
But further distant. Then the cavaliers
Desired to rush upon him. With a smile,
Anasco wisely interposed, and drawled,
"No fame we win in battling with one man;
Nor can we spare one horseman from our troop,
Nor one horse. Ride around him." In chagrin,
With smothered groans, they did so. Seeing this,
The savage sped his arrows, but in vain,
For some would miss the mark, some glance from steel.
"Come on, ye squaws that pass for men!" he yelled;
"Alone, I defy thirty!" Hard it was
For high-born youths to hear that blatant churl
Fling insult after insult, and they cried,

"Anasco, let us face him! Let us slay
This imp who dares to rouse Castilian blood."
Anasco smiled again, retorting, "No!"

A lake they passed, where wild swans from the North
In a great flock had gathered.⁵² Swirling round,
White as a snowstorm over Arctic seas,
Into the waves they fluttered one by one.
With arching necks they glided there superb,
Fairer than floating moons. No radiant bloom
Of the magnolia ever hung above
More spotless: never a water-lily mirrored
A purer bosom in the depths below!
"Come, let us fire upon them," cried a youth
Unto Anasco. "Wouldst arouse the foe?"
He answered: "Haste thou not to end the lives
Of others, when thine own is hung in doubt."

Often the Indians chased them; turning not,
But setting every spur against its steed,
Though cavaliers, like cravens they sped on,
Leaving their wild pursuers far behind.
In time, a horseman groaned in agony,
Reeled, swayed without his sell, and toppled dead.
That night they rested, and another still
Dropped, languished, and died speedily: then some
Were terror-stricken, shrieking out, "The Plague!"
But Arias reassured them, saying, "Peace!
Have ye no faith? In this vast wilderness
God still is ruler: think not that His eye
May overlook you, though you stray afar:
For, like the sun that tracks you through these
wolds,
Wherever you may go, He also goes.

Here he still guards you. Fear not." So all came
And joined in praying for their comrades dead.

Two other rivers halted them; great storms
Had swollen both the streams to raging floods,
That roaring, rushing, and foaming angrily,
Were perilous to breast. Their coursers balked
In terror at the whirlpools, but the men
Spurred fiercely on, and soon all floundered over.
At last they reached the camp where Calderon
Was waiting with the ships they knew of yore,
And so with laughter and with tears, with shouts
And rough embraces, like a crowd of boys
The old companions met in joy again.

First toward Cuba having turned one sail,
Anasco manned the other barks, steered north,
And anchored soon in Apalachee Bay.
Part only of the troops the ships could bear,
And so the others hobbled on by land,
Oppressed with hunger, trapped by ambuscades,
Bedraggled in the sludge of swamps and fens,
By whooping hordes, that banished sleep, pursued.
These joined their comrades later; on the way
Brave men and faithful steeds had died: a worn,
A woe-begone and ragged band, crawled in
The gaunt survivors. After they had come,
Diego Maldonado was sent forth
To north and west with the two caravels,
To seek still other harbors. Slowly crawled
The slothful days, till nigh two weary moons
Had faded, and sad friends awaited still,
But vainly, for the fleet's return. At last
The sweet-gum in the woods had flushed from green

To crimson and to purple; on the sprays
Of bittersweet the scarlet berries glowed;
The plump brown hazel peeped without its shell,
Ready to drop to earth,—yet still they watched,
Vainly, to sight the barks again. Men lost
All hope of greeting the ships or sailors more,
Till one day, past the eve of Autumntide,
One happy day of days, when they discerned,
Like the white wings of doves of peace afar,
The sails of Maldonado speeding home.
When the bold mariner returned, he told
Of still another bay, noblest of all
Among those yet discovered.⁵³ Knowing well
The pathway that he once had trod before,
Straightway Anasco journeyed to our camp,
And told me of this harbor. When I learned
Of the discovery, messengers I sent
To Apalachee Bay with new commands
To Maldonado and to Calderon,
Saying, “Return ye to the Cuban shores,
Taking the ships and sailors at your post,
And bear my greetings unto Isabel.
While in Havana load your ships with corn,
With raiment, arms and armor, that our band
May need hereafter, and when Autumn calms
Over the sea shall next prevail, return,
And moor your vessels in the northern bay
That Maldonado found.” This last behest
Obeying, southward soon the prows were turned.

Next marched our host still further to the north,⁵⁴
And here through long dark lonesome winter moons,
Suffering from coldness, hunger and disease,
We lingered. Nurtured in warm Southern realms,

My lads, amidst that Northern waste of rime,
Around the camp-fires huddled drearily,
And shivered, homesick and despondent: oft
They wondered if their weary feet should ever
The happy sunlands of their youth regain.
Like flocks of tropic birds on Arctic shores,
Our slaves, from green Floridian palm-groves torn,
Through flying sleet and hail roamed cheerlessly:
They shuddered in the keen-edged Iceland winds,
Or fell asleep and died in shroud-like snows.
With aching brows, hot hands and burning feet,
The Iberians, fever-stricken, tossed and groaned.
In rude log-cabins we would build great fires
Of odorous hickory-logs, that steamed and sang,
And oozed with honeyed sap, blazing on high
With great blue flames. But soon the pigmy rooms
Would wax as hot as ovens: so the sick
Fainted from stifling heat. Then if the fires
Our hands extinguished, freezingly the blasts
Through every chink would stream again: once more,
When bitter gusts howled at the creaking doors
Like famished packs of wild, ferocious wolves,
Together we would huddle by the hearth,
And shudder, clutched in Winter's grip again.

In Cuba we had loaded on our ships
A herd of lusty swine, and patiently
These we had coaxed and led, or driven on,
A great unwieldy, noisy multitude,
Through forest, swamp and stream, six hundred miles
In safety. They had multiplied ere long
To bristly armies, and they served us now
As gladly-welcomed food. But day by day
The swine were slaughtered in such greedy haste,

Fearing to lose them all, I portioned some,
Though sparingly, among the troops. Soon these
Were all devoured, and seeing that the herd
Dwindled to swift extinction, I forbade
All further butchery. So the famished troops
Went munching roots and berries, barks and twigs,
Or scratching for acorns through dead leaves or snows,
Crunching the few they found voraciously.
No salt we had, and often dying men,
Delirious, yet with reason glimmering still,
Would cry out in their feverish agony,
"O for a morsel of fresh meat, and salt!
If only those were brought I yet might live!"
And now, in ravenous madness, hollow-eyed,
Whatever loathsome food men found, they seized:
The Indians' dogs they slew,⁵⁵—disgustful thought!—
And like rapacious lynxes gorged themselves,
Devouring till they choked. Even this vile food
Grown scarce in time, they quarreled and they fought
For portions of the unclean things, and lost
All semblance of once-proud humanity.
In thought, if not in deed, turned cannibal,
Upon each other wolfishly they glared,
Carnivorous, lustful of their fellows' blood.

But snows and storms and darkness can not reign
Over earth forever: and there beats no heart,
Though pierced with grief most poignant, but ere long
Must shed its weeds of sorrow, and renew
The silken robes of joyance. So at last
Through the numb desolation gently breathed
Faint premonitions of the sweets of May,
As through a lover's bosom softly steal
Prophetic whispers of his love returned.

And like an ice-bound, torpid mountain stream,
Rock-shadowed, in December's iron grip,
That rends its fetters, seeks the southern plains,
And scintillates and sparkles in the sun,
The young Year, freed from frost and sleet and snow,
Through vernal vistas tripped and laughed and sang.
The birds and blooms went plotting busily,—
A camarilla of all sweets of Spring
To drive the Winter King in banishment.
In adolescence warmly germinal
Impassioned South-winds came begetting flowers.
The green savannahs thrilled with meadow larks,
Dark dingles echoed with the madrigals
Of brilliant red-birds. Gorgeous orioles
Glimmered and glowed through verdant woods like
flame.

Green branches wantoned with enamored gales,
That tossed their bloomy chaplets, vanishing
In sighings fragrant and melodious.
Spring, the sweet victress, conquered all the world,
And underneath her white, rose-tinted feet
The ruins of the old year all were wreathed
In April buds and blossoms myriadfold.

When the grim winter scenes were overpast,
Through happy lands of fruitfulness we marched,
Where master, slave and steed were lodged and fed
With ever-lavish hospitality:
Our hearts laughed in our bosoms; we forgot
The abhorrent miseries of our bygone days.

The chiefs sent lads before them, playing flutes⁵⁶
Whose strains were softer than the blue-bird's lay
Warbled to woo his mate: these dulcet notes

Were overtures of peace. The red men came
Staggering with presents of wild turkeys, quails,
And plump opossums: then their patient squaws
Came bowed with heavier burdens, that, cast down,
Rose in great hillocks,—multitudes of hares,
And bushy raccoons, heaped with slaughtered deer.
With wine-like juices dripping lusciously,
Mulberries in big baskets came. The fields
With wild strawberries, fragrant, sharp and sweet,
Abounded wondrously.⁵⁷ Along our way
Vast plains of vivid palpitating green
Were intersprinkled with the ruddy fruit;
Their flavor and aroma might have lured
A baby cherub from his play in heaven
To stain his dainty mouth and dimpled hands!

We trod by gushing springs, and quaffed of streams
Babbling and bubbling joyously. We loved
To loiter by those lucent rills, for there
The pink wild roses breathed delightful breath,
There bluets peeped like roguish little eyes,
There red azaleas through the coppice flamed,
And lilting, warbling, trilling, caroling,
The mocking birds saluted from their sprays.

But soon great rains fell, and we plodded on
Slowly and grumly, swimming many a stream
Flooded by April storms to raging seas.
Rushing with eddying whirlpools, oftentimes
The torrents swept both knight and steed away,
Perchance to watery graves. And now the land
Lost all its fairness and its fruitfulness.
The forest dwindled to a ragged waste
Of stunted pines, where neither man nor brute

Could eke subsistence. Our brave chargers lagged
Dejected, lean and jaded, with their ribs
Limned sharp through tight-drawn skin: so weak
they grew,
Oft we dismounted, leading them by hand,
Fearing the nags might sink to earth beneath us.
But Nimble Foot, grown happier day by day,
Now wreathed in blissful smiles, and as his eyes
Flashed, and his bosom heaved, he cried elate,
"Be of good cheer! These dreary scenes must end,
For we shall be in Cofachiqui soon!"

And soon indeed we reached the land we sought.⁵⁸
Startling that transformation! In one day
The desert melted into soft domains
Of goodlihood and plenty. Dumb we stood,
Like beggars from starvation perishing
In rags and tatters, grime and wretchedness,
Whose eyes, unsealed, wide open in amaze
On bending orchard-boughs of Paradise.

Alonzo Romo, with a troop of lads
In age and arms his peers, sped on before,
I with the veterans slowly following.
Climbing a hillock, not afar they spied
A noble river, white with silvern waves
That glinted through the green. A rivulet
With foamy cascades babbled down a gorge
Beneath them, and in swift meanderings
Glided to join its more majestic brother.
Now heard they peals of laughter, gleeful shouts,
And noise of mischief-making. Creeping down
The monticle, through interwoven boughs
And interlacing vines, about the brook
A throng of woodland damosels they spied.⁵⁹

Naked the maids are as magnolia blooms
Discarding sombre husks, and sweetly nude,
Baring their virgin bosoms. In amaze
And agitated joy, the Spanish lads
From ambush view them, unespied themselves.
Flushed are the boyish cheeks; in boyish veins
The red blood thrills and tingles,—youth will
flame

As long as springtime burgeons, morning dawns!
Some maidens breast the deeper currents; some
Are wading in the shallows; others yet
Splash water in their comrades' faces. Screams
And roguish laughter mingle: wantonly
They gambol in the waves, or from the banks
Leap headlong, diving. Others throng the pools
In sunshine, bending low to view themselves
Depicted in those greenwood mirrors; there
They smooth and dry their faces, and arrange
Their dripping tresses. But for streaming locks,
No damsel hath a shred of drapery.

Bewitching is their loveliness, and yet
How chaste their every movement! As the youths
Gaze on them, they admire the curving limbs
Of tawny marble; graceful arms and lithe;
Their ankles, smooth and brown as chestnut shells;
Their bosoms, glowing with a soft maroon,
With breasts like russet oval Autumn fruits;
Their cheeks, like dusky twilights, lit with flames
Of crimson afterglows. Lissom their forms,
Athletic, and yet delicate. They seem,
Amid that floral setting, like a throng
Of elves and fays, with joyous revelry
Dispersing gloom from sylvan solitudes.

Hilarious and unruly all, yet each
In virgin thought is purest of the pure.

Some seek repose, and pillow weary heads
On mossy knolls, or turfs of tender green
Besprent with starry bluets: others trip
Through fern-clad nooks, or cool their slender feet
In lush and dewy grasses. Loitering
In leafy coverts, groups are plucking boughs
Of snowy-blossomed dogwood; happy throngs
Go laughing, with their lightsome girlish forms
Engarlanded with creamy locust blooms;
These, gathering clustered sprays of jessamine,
The luscious fragrances inhale. Bedight
In festoons of the red-bud, or yclad
With branches torn from flowering tulip-trees,
Some wilding beauties veil their nakedness.
Small bebies of the maidens in a field
Gather strawberries; from their puckered lips,
Down cheeks and chins trickles the juicy red.
Bands more demure their tiny baskets heap
With tart and odorous fruit. One merry lass,
Shouting and struggling, clasps in arms a mate,
Smearing her cheeks with scarlet; yet another,
Loading her fist with calycanthus tips,
Seizes a comrade, crushing on her face
The brown buds, redolent of frankincense.
Sprightful are all, and happy. Sportively
They bound, and fairly they flit, now here,
Now there. Two young and splendid Amazons,
Slender and graceful as symmetric pards,
Wrestle and tug and scuffle playfully,
Twining and twisting shapely arms and thighs

In vine-like fashion, straining stubbornly,
Or clinching breast to breast in mimic war.

As wooingly and cooingly the notes
Of soft enamored blue-birds soothe the ear,
They answer with their girlish tittering:
They echo back the thrush's roundelay,
Accept the red-bird's challenge, paraphrase
The oriole's ditty, jeer the meadow-lark,
And mock the mock-bird in his plagiarisms.

But next from thickets nigh the lads beheld
Three withered beldames rush. These veteran
squaws,—
All bearded, crescented of nose and chin,
Palsied of hand, wet-eyed and wrinkle-browed,—
Wagging their heads and shaking knotty fists,
Jabbered from toothless jaws and rusty throats
Sounds of alarm. Like surly griffins, set
To guard a priceless treasure, they had stood,
Grim sentinels, when danger lurked to raise
The cry of warning. Bended half to earth
With ancientness, the crones remembered not
They too had once been young: nay, much they
loathed
The sight of youth in freedom! So the hags
From cracked and battered wind-pipes shrieked and
screeched,
Grating with merciless harshness on young ears,
“Avaunt, ye prying striplings! Dare ye not
To peep and eavesdrop further! Hence, ye brats!”
The young intruders at their menaces
Paused half in fear. As the duennas raged,
Smit were the girls with terror. Like a flock

Of startled robins, back and forth they sped,
Endeavoring to escape. Through colonnades
Of hoary forest-trees they ran to hide:
But near the runnel's further slope, the gorge
Reared steeply walls, thwarting their hurried flight.

But now the youths dashed forth, reaching the spot
Where lay the damsels' cast-off garments. Here
Shouting with laughter stood they, as the girls,
Ensnared, despoiled of raiment, barred from flight,
Went screaming frightedly, and flushed and burned,
Ever attempting vainly to conceal
From lawless eyes their helpless nudity.
Some sought to hide them in their glossy hair,
And some in trailing grape-vines torn from boughs
Above them; and still others made them shields
Of flaming clusters of azalea blooms,
That seemed to blush with sympathetic shame.

Louder the youngers laughed to view the plight
Wherein their victims stood. But now Alonzo,
Even more embarrassed than the girls themselves,
Drooped blushfully his face, nor scarcely dared
Over his beauteous thralls one glance to steal.
And soon, perceiving how the damosels
Stood trembling at their captors' taunts, he turned
Upon his fellows, and indignant, cried,
"For shame! Leave them their garments! Come
away!"

On hearing thus their champion speak, some girls,
Half reassured, came forward: suddenly,
Perceiving how he flushed and hung his head,
One lass grew bolder still, and roguishly

Approached him with a basket brimmed with fruit:
This she gave to him, archly scanning him
With twinkling eyes of mischief, for the boy,
Abashed and shamefaced, feared to look upon her,
Thus draped in Nature's undraped loveliness.
Stammering with awkwardness, he thanked her,
 while
His comrades and the maidens joined in laughter.

At that same moment, riding down the gorge,
I came upon them: having strayed afar,
My horse's snowy ankles now were red
With the blood of berries crushed along the way
Through scarlet-fruited plains. As I appeared,
Diverted at the novel sight, one maid,
Encouraged by my smile, approached me, nude,
Yet peerless in her virgin loveliness
As nude and unadorned Diana, glimpsed,
Snowily splendid, through the springtime green
In flowerful vales of Delos. "Bonnibel,"
I asked her, "Canst thou tell me if I tread
In the realms of Cofachiqui? And thy queen,—
If she be thine,—where may I find her?" Then
The stately virgin, drawing still more near,
And gently smiling, said, "Sir Knight, even now
Art thou in Cofachiqui: fleet of foot,
Thy fame hath sped before thee, and our queen
Prepares to bid thee welcome. Mighty lord,
Her handmaids are we; and upon yon river,
Before the noontide glows, her barge appears."

Then I: "Sweet maiden, tell me, in what cove
Of yonder river-strand will the queen's barge
Be moored? Say, is it near or far? How long

The journey thither?" Archly answered she,
"How long the journey? Why, in truth, Sir Knight,
That on thy willingness or unwillingness,
Thine eagerness or backwardness, depends.
Wert thou a lover, straying with thy lass
Through leafy lanes in springtime, gathering flowers,
And listening to the birds, her hand in thine,
And thou advantage taking of those hours,—
Those golden hours of courtship,—not till eve
Your creeping, long-delaying, laggard feet
The spot ye seek might find: and yet, my lord,
If thou wert all alone, and hurrying on
Anxious to meet her at the tryst, thy feet,—
Eager, impatient, hasty,—ere a thrush
Could end his little song, would speed thee there."

Thereat her girlish cohorts laughed at me.
Then other maidens timidly approached,
Their modest eyes allured by wonderment,
My steed beholding; more courageous grown,
They drew still nearer, and soft hands they laid
In pleasure on his silken neck and mane.
Still others offered baskets heaped with berries,
Luscious and fragrant, dripping nectarous wine.
But some, more shy, still trembled, and cast down
Their liquid eyes, viewing their own sweet selves,
Unshielded from the glance of roguish boys.
I blessed them in my heart, and cried aloud,
"Shrink not, nor tremble, beauteous damosels,
For Nature's garb is the garb of Innocence,
And Truth is chastely naked like yourselves."

BOOK XVIII

De Soto's Narrative continued—Approach of the royal barge—The Queen of Cofachiqui—She twines a string of pearls around De Soto's neck, and gives him a kindly welcome—Her meeting with Nimble Foot—Feasting among the soldiers—Discovery of pearls—Deserted villages—The old temple and its statues—Discovery of arms and armor, and a rosary of jet, in the temple—The Catacombs—Vast wealth of pearls—Nimble Foot weds the Queen of Cofachiqui—De Soto and his band, after many remonstrances from the men, leave Cofachiqui—Parting of Nimble Foot and Vasconcelos—Some soldiers desert, and remain behind—The mountains of Xualla.

NOW we marched to the river. Not an hour Had passed, before our all-impatient eyes Beheld a great canoe approach. In this, Reclining at her ease upon a throne, (Of intertwining antlers of the stag And convoluting horns of bison wrought), Surrounded by her chiefs, appeared the queen. Young was she, tall, superbly beautiful, And graceful as a panther. Bright of eye, With softly-rounded cheeks, with glossy hair, With delicate lips enwreathed in gentle smiles, Her dusky face's wild sweet loveliness The homage of the sternest heart compelled. Upon her brow were plumes of tanagers, In vivid scarlet, and of orioles,

Gorgeous in orange and in sable, while
An airy egret crest, surmounting all,
Twinkled its white rays high above her head.
Long twisted ropes of milky orient pearls
Around her neck and on her arms she wore.
An awning stretched above her; at her side
Billowed light cushions, painted brilliantly,
While varicolored carpets eased her feet.
Her garb of dappled fawnskin, silken-soft,
Curved with the graceful contour of her form.
Barbaric was the pomp of coloring,
And yet harmonious with her savage state.
Her bark attained the land; the queen took seat
Upon a palanquin. Four warriors came,
And bore her, in the palanquin reclined,
To where I stood. With stateliness and ease
Down stepped she from her place, and smilingly
A string of pearls about my neck entwined;
Three times it wrapped around, and still it fell
Down to my bosom; the refulgent pearls
Beamed soft with chastened iridescent fires,
Like rich-hued light through creamy clouds of
dawn.

"Sir Knight, I bid thee welcome," spake the queen;

"Whatever may be mine is also thine."

"Lady," I answered, "unto wearied men

Plodding with painful steps through stranger lands,

Sweet is the salutation kindly given,

But tenfold sweeter falls it from the lips

Of one so gracious, so superb, so fair."

From off my finger then I slipped a ring

Set with a ruby; taking her shapely hand,

Her own forefinger's sweet and tiny cirque

I banded with the slender hoop of gold.

Here Nimble Foot, by some mischance delayed,
Came rushing up, his splendid eyes aflame,
His ebon locks in disarray, his bosom
Heaving with strong emotion. First his arms
Outstretching, he forgot us, as it seemed,
Seeking to fold the maiden to his heart,
And then, remembering quickly where he was,
And in whose presence, on his knees he fell
Before her, crying out, "My queen, my queen!"
Trembling with eager joy, he seized her hand,
Kissing it ardently. And now the queen,
Despite her self-repression brought to bear
Before our gathered throng, allowed a glimpse
Into her secret heart. Her lovely lips
Quivered; her liquid eyes with unshed tears
Grew misty, and her soft breasts rose and fell
Like rounded billows of sweet locust blooms
Surging and swelling in the winds of spring.

Ah, then I knew that though he loved his queen
As a true subject, yet he loved her more
As the youth loves the maiden: and the queen,
Albeit she loved the subject at her feet,
Loved more the youth enthroned within her heart
As lord and master! Happy Indian brave,
The conqueror of a human heart through love,
More to be envied art thou for thy prize,
Than he who conquers all the world through fear!

Tents the queen gave us, gifts of corn she made;
Knight, servant, steed, she thoughtfully supplied.
Bending and tottering under mighty loads
Of viands, came her people: there were quails,
And ducks and wild-geese: scores of turkeys made

Morsels delicious for our hungry mouths.
Great baskets of strawberries, oozing forth
The fragrant heart's blood of the wounded fruit,
Were fetched by lads panting beneath their weight.
They brought us fat and juicy carcasses
Of deer and bear; deep trenches next were dug,
Wherein were kindled fires; over the coals
The tender flesh of game was barbecued
A rich brown,—smoking, dripping, sputtering.
Well might that savory banquet have seduced
An Esau to renounce his rights of birth!
So here we rested many happy days.
This goodly kingdom with abundance flowed:
Here was enlightenment exceeding far
All else in these rude lands:⁶⁰ the habitants,
Not naked like their kindred of the wilds,
Enrobed in cloths fine-woven, or in skins
Dressed cunningly and handsomely; their feet
In gaudy moccasins were clad. They seemed,
Proudly displaying barbarous finery,
Like gipsies flaunting holiday attire.

The queen, hearing my exclamations once,
While gazing in wonder on her gift of pearls,
Beckoned to me, and whispered me aside,
“In bygone years there raged a pestilence
That swept innumerable legions unto death
From my dominions: through the wasted realms
Of pestilence, deserted villages
Are left in silent solitudes forlorn
Where no man goes.⁶¹ All shun them as accurst.
Amidst those deserts ruined temples stand,
With burial-caverns leading from them, far
Into earth's lonely midnight realms: and there

May ye who value pearls so dearly, find
Such gathered treasures of the white-orbed gems,
Your horses can not bear them all away."
Incredulous I heard; still she declared,
"Truth have I spoken: if thou doubtest me,
Go thou, and thine own eyes make witnesses."
So heeding her instructions, with seven knights
I started on the quest. Long hours we rode,
And as the sun drooped lowly in the west,
That sad and solitary land we reached.

Entering a village, as we halted steed,
Our hearts failed: in that still, deserted haunt,
A sudden awe possessed us. When our feet
On pathways overgrown with grasses fell,
A muffled sound uprose, as though our tread
Woke ghostly echoes of long-buried years.
Our very horses seemed to shiver in fear;
Pricking their ears, they started suddenly,
Or, snorting, stared with frightened eyes through shades
In deep recesses of down-drooping boughs.
Here deadly nightshade flourished; high uprose
Datura boughs, and hoary mullein spires,
While ironweeds and ragweeds choked the way.
Here sombre cedars rustled; mournfully
Funereal cypresses hung gloomy palls.
Into the cabins now we went: and there,
Albeit we trod tiptoe, our lightest steps
Fell harsh and loud; sharp echoes we aroused,
As though our feet stamped on the rotting floor:
We spoke in whispers; yet the words we breathed
Smote like an impious shout; startled we stood,
That death-calm to profane. For who could wish
In vulgar recklessness to desecrate

Such weird and solemn stillness? In these huts,
Dilapidated and decaying, once
The dusky lover and his damsel wooed,
Here wedded, and within them had been heard
The infant's cry that told barbarian ears
A new man-child had entered into the world.
Here croons of mother to pappoose were heard,
And here the babe's soft babble in reply.
At sundown, from the forest coming home
With furred and feathered trophies of the hunt,
The proud young father here had sung wild songs,
Tossing his eldest-born in savage joy.
But all were gone! Our heads in corners dark
Were meshed with cobwebs; from their nests of down
Scampered the squeaking mice; the mud-fly paused
From singing at his work; his tiny eyes
Stared at the strangers there in blank amaze.

The ruined homes we left, and gladly breathed
Free air outdoors; but pensive were our thoughts
There, as within; a weight of solitude
Loaded us down; we moved as men enthralled
Under some necromancer's potent charms.
The noisy bluejay curbed his noisy tongue,
And chirped with serious air. On a dead tree
The gray woodpecker thumped with a hollow sound,
Then ceased the profanation as in fear.

We reached a dismal tarn; black were its waves
From shadows of the overlooming boughs.
Like the wan ghost of some departed brave
Haunting his ruined home of bygone years,
A great white heron lifted spectral wings,
Cleaved the dark boughs, and glimmering, disappeared.

At length we reached the temple;⁶² high it rose
Above a stone foundation; its great walls,
Upbuilt of prodigious cedar beams,
Defiant seemed of storms of centuries.
But long neglected, from its sinking sides
Great chinks and cracks were gaping. In its front
Two black holes, rotting, seemed gigantic eyes,
Making us start; quickly, as half in dream,
Some gripped their swords, while others crossed
themselves.

But over all the ruin crept green vines
Luxuriant in their wildness, as around
A lost soul, scarred and blasted, yet in its doom
Not all deserted, from some faithful heart
Fasten the tendrils of unselfish love,
And wreathe the old wreck in affection still.

Into the fane we went, and there we saw
Twelve giant statues, carved of solid oak,⁶³
Six upon either side, uplifting clubs,
Axes of stone, arrows and tomahawks.
Barbarian gods were these: each hideous face
Scowled with distorting frowns: distended eyes
Stared with a rigid corpse-like fixedness,
Yet as in living hatred at us, come
To disenthroned them from the hearts of men.
Around them hung a world of mussel-shells,
Stripped of their pearls, and in rococo manner
Decking the walls and ceilings. Treading here,
Startled, upon the floor a dirk we spied,
A battered helmet and a rusty sword,
Biscayan iron axes, and with these
A rosary of jet. Long ere our day,
A Spanish leader, (Ayllon was his name,⁶⁴

As Nimble Foot had told us,) with his band
Had sailed here, seeking to explore the realm.
But never had his homeward-steering prow
Rejoiced the eyes that waited his return,
For here it was that he and all his host
Suffered that fate the Indian youth had told,
From deadly ambushades athwart their path
Through the dark tangled forests, long ago
The red men smote them, sparing none: so then
The pagans all the Christian dead despoiled,
And brought these relics to the fane austere,
As offerings to delight their hideous gods.
Still more ferocious glared the idols now!
Their copper clubs seemed brandished at our heads,
Their taut-drawn bows seemed aiming at our hearts,
Their rigid lips seemed parting in a threat,
Downcalling on us dooms unspeakable,
Like the dread fate that claimed our countrymen.

Torches we lighted, and so entered next
A cave-like opening; for this temple stood
Against a hill wherein were labyrinths
Far underground meandering through the night,—
Vast catacombs where slept the Indian dead.
As we passed inward, out there swept a gust
As chilly as a cheerless autumn blast,
But heavy with the scent of dust and mould,
And mildew. Throngs of startled bats flew round,
Brushing our ears with long and leathery wings,
And shrilly chattering. In the cavern's depths
Were coffins piled on coffins,—all of wood,
Rough-carved with cryptic figures; in them lay
The young, the old,—man, woman, youth and babe.
Their garments, after all these weary years,

Hung on them loosely, mouldering into rags.
Many the moons had been since these had lived,
Had loved, been loved, and died. Skulls, bones and
hair

Alone remained to prove that once was here
Life, with its thrills of joyance and despair,
Its aspirations, conquests and defeats,
Its matins at the dawn, and evensongs
Chanted at twilight for the last long sleep.

Within each casket beamed uncounted pearls,—⁶⁵
Each held enough a living man to load
With wealth imperial. Lustrous necklaces
Gleamed white on withered bosoms; bracelets beamed
On bony wrists that lifted nevermore.
Seed-pearls were scattered with the mummied babes.
So when our torches flamed above them there,
Through their white radiance glowed their hues of pink,
Soft green, pale azure, tender violet,
Dim orange,—fleeting, frail and delicate,
Like transitory, fragile rainbow tints
That quiver in aerial fountain-spray.
But over all these hung resplendent gems
In blending festoon mazes, that appeared,
Most wondrous and magnificent of all,
A transcendental moondawn in the night.

We gathered great heaps of the marvelous pearls,—
More than enough our avarice to console
For gold and silver hunted for in vain.
Some pearls were oval, some had shapes of pears,
Many were perfect spheres: like eggs of doves,
Some were pure white; like blue-bird eggs were some,
Pale and ethereal azure: some were black,

Still others copper-hued. In likenesses
Of little birds or babes had some been carved.
We now remembered the Egyptian queen,
Dissolving pearls in honor of her lover;
This Cleopatra of the Occident
Who in her barge adown that noble river
Had come to bid us welcome to her land,
A thousand such resplendent pearls might quaff,
Some dusky, plume-crowned Antony to please.

Returning to our horses ere the sun
Had fallen, back to camp we took our way,
Silent and grave, albeit within our scrips
Were priceless treasures. Speedily we rode,
Yet not till moonset, when night's crescent glowed
Blood-red through black boughs of the western woods,
Did we rejoin the band. We found the queen
And all our friends awaiting us: and so,
When we revealed our prize of wondrous pearls,
All the Iberians,—peasants, cavaliers,
Striplings and graybeard veterans,—stood amazed,
Rapt in wild admiration and delight.
Then said the queen: "Still other caves there be,
Vast resting-places of the men who died
In long-past years, with treasuries of pearls
Surpassing even those your eyes have seen
Already. Bide a little longer here,
And if you wish, their riches shall be yours."

Wearied, we sought our couches. At the dawn,
Not fully rested yet from all the toils
Of the past day, unwonted slothfulness
Weighed down upon me, and I slumbered still.
Then came Vasconcelos with hasty steps

Unto my tent. "Arouse, my lord!" he cried,
"For on this morn my comrade, Nimble Foot,
Weds with the queen."⁶⁶ Hearing his words amazed,
I leaped from bed, arranged my garb, and soon
Was wending with the noble Portuguese
Unto the outskirts of a wood that fringed
Our camping-field. And now Vasconcelos
Told all the annals of the courtship; how
The young man had persisted; how the queen
Had long delayed him, and how, in the end,
The youth had triumphed. To his kindly friend
Had Nimble Foot unbosomed all, and now
In turn the knight of Portugal told me,—
The same old story, trite and commonplace,
And yet forever new!

We reached, ere long,
The border of the wood, and there beheld
Great eager throngs collected,—subjects all
Of the young queen. And standing in the midst
Of all that multitude, we soon espied,
Together, side by side and hand in hand,
The queen, and our young forest cavalier.
O, never wedding morn in East or West
Beheld a pair more noble! Tall he stood,
Slender and straight, and lordly in his air,
Like the superbest poplar of the field,
While she in maiden beautyhood and grace
Outvied the loveliest myrtle in its bloom.
Over them rose broad-leaved catalpa trees,
Snowing white blossoms through the fragrant air,
While wild blackberries in the neighboring copse
Snowed starry petals from their creamy sprays
Through the green grass about the lovers' feet.

A mocking-bird, perched on a swaying bough
Above them, rained a sparkling cataract
Of bubbling melodies, sprinkling afar
His notes like dewdrops in the fields at dawn.

There was no priest beside them. But I heard
The stalwart young chief say, "Thou art my spouse,"
Whereat the queen replied, "And thou art mine."
This the whole ceremony, naught remained
To bind them closer: they were one for life.

Returning to our camp, the friars joined
In clamor, saying, "Such are heathen rites!
No form, no ritual, no solemnity!
They are not truly wedded." But I cried,
"Cease, cease this bigot caviling! They stand
As truly wedded as our parents stood.
Wedlock becomes not wedlock through bare form;
True marriage is in spirit, not in speech;
It dwelleth in the heart, not on the tongue,
Fed on sweet inward thoughts, not outward shows."

After this reigned a jubilee, when all
Held blithesome holiday. The youths and maids,
Dancing and feasting and singing, made both night
And day a time for joyance. Through the groves
Young lovers strolled together, hand in hand,
In emulation of the royal pair
Planning their own sweet nuptials soon. The old
Sat silent on the mossy knotted roots
Of ancient trees, or on gray vine-clad stones
Along the wayside. Pensive there, alone,
Watching the happy youngers tripping by,
Now they recalled from out the buried past

Their own sweet courtship days, forever done.
The festival ceased not, till, in the skies,
The fragile crescent of the eventide
Rounded, and then, a crescent once again,
Melted away in rosy depths of morn.

These revels over, mindful of the pearls
Discovered in the catacombs, my friends
Came thronging to me eagerly, and said:
"Haste, let us seek these caves, and spoil the tombs
Of all their treasures. We will recompense
Our purses for their losses of the past
In the vain search for gold. Come, let us go."
But I replied: "Nay, soldiers. Let your hands
Ransack the sepulchres for gems no more.
We have not reached our goal; it lies afar.
Stand ye prepared at any hour to march
Onward again for El Dorado. There,
There only, shall your path have end. Our feet
Must dally not, nor linger on the way,
For this is but the beginning of our task
Of conquest and of empire."

At these words,
Cries of amazement, anger and dismay
Rose from all present. Then they said again:
"We long for rest: let us not wander more,
But remain here, build fortresses and towns,
And make the realm a colony of Spain."
"Ye have mine answer," I replied. But now
Lobillo said, "In all our marches yet,
Losses alone have we encountered. Come,
Cease this mad quest, bowing to Fate's decree
That bids us yield the struggle." But I cried,

"Confess defeat? Surrender? No, not I!
Through all my years, let this my motto be:
'When others quit discouraged, I fight on.' "

Then Nuño de Tobar: "Think of the ills
Endured already! But bethink thee more
Of ills an hundredfold more trying, yet
Awaiting us in the deep western wilds!
Think of the winters of distress, the nights
Of misery, that would fold around us there!"
I answered, "Let the nights and winters come!
For every night must have its end in dawn,
And every Winter have its end in Spring."

As the crowd, silenced, slowly moved away,
Grinding his teeth, Juan Gaytun snarled, "Ye Gods!
When will this man be satisfied, and rest?
'Knight of the March-winds' call him; pausing not,
Blustering unbridled, still he rushes on
Madly and blindly. Reft of peace himself,
Snatching and sweeping rest and peace from others,—
When will he cease to rave?" This uttered apart,
Half openly, and half in an undertone
To others, yet I heard. Answering, I cried:
"You dub me Knight of the March-winds. But
know this:

After the sleep of winter, gusts of March
The sluggish trees awake, and through the veins
Of gaunt and withered boughs, at their behest
Tingles the sap again. And then, as men
Arousing from a long sleep stretch themselves,
And yawning, rub their eyes, and bend and sway
Backward and forward, reaching out their arms,
Straining their muscles, lissoming their limbs,—

So these long-torpid trees, in winds of March
 Tossing and twisting, bending back and forth,
 Wake from their sleep, and know true life again.
 Gaytun, the figure is thine own. Arouse,
 And heed me well: or else the March-wind's lash
 Shall sting thee to thy duty." Silently
 He heard me, though he frowned and scowled. The
 rest
 Beholding me determined, held their peace.

And now the easy, careless days were over.
 Our men stood broken-hearted as I bade
 The march begin. But more than all the rest,
 Vasconcelos and Nimble Foot were bowed
 Under a pall of sorrow. Still, the youth,
 Choosing a consort, now must others forsake;
 For both a master and a slave is he
 Who loves and is loved. And Vasconcelos,
 Twining his arm around the slender form
 Of the dear lad so long his bosom's mate,
 Said softly, "Weep not: yet remember still
 Our sweet companionship in other days,—
 Days that are dead forever,—precious days
 That never, never shall we see again.
 And still, bethink thee, that the pain we feel
 In parting, only comes because we once
 Have loved each other. Had we felt no pain,
 We never had known affection. Yea, my lad,
 As there can be no shadow without sun,
 So without joy there never can be sorrow,
 For sorrow is the shadow cast by joy."

So then we marched away. On the first night,
 At roll-call in the wilderness, we found

A score of men deserted. These we never
Beheld again: slinking, they lagged behind,
Chose savage mates, and bode there, self-marooned
From all communion with the Christian world.

Turning our feet toward the setting sun,
The country of Xualla next we reached,⁶⁷
A land of mountains and of cataracts,
Translucent rivers, dark and ancient woods.
No snow was on the mountains; they pierced not
With sterile granite peaks the highest heavens:
But dreamy were they in their loveliness,
Soft in their azure hazes, and their brows
Were draped in shadows gently folding down,
Like the still gray wings of a brooding dove.
In stony clefts of immemorial hills
Were bowery valleys, wreathed with trailing vines,
Where song-birds bubbled with the bubbling rills,
Luring the heart to haunts in fairyland.
Above all hung cerulean crystal skies,
As bright and clear as blue eyes of a boy.

As one strode higher, mist enwreathed the rocks.
Colossal trees shot upward to the sky,
And shed eternal darkness. At their feet,
The gloomy shadows of surrounding woods
With solitude and silence awed the soul;
And naught amid that wilderness was heard
Save deep, faint rustling of the forest leaves,
And horse-voiced waterfalls through solemn shades,
Like prisoned thunder roaring far away.

Dark hemlocks reared their pensive boughs aloft;
Great spruces rose in sombre majesty;
In mournful winds, sighed the funereal pines.

Prodigious ferns uplifted verdant plumes;
Long velvet mosses mantled flinty rocks;
Through dim recesses, rhododendrons shone
With pink and white and purple clustering blooms
That scattered petals on the rushing brooks.
Blue springs came gurgling forth from lichened stones,
And mirrored in their depths dark violets,
And Turk's-cap lilies, flushed with ruddy hues,
Like peasant maids with red and freckled cheeks.
The rills, uniting, flowed diaphanous,
With darting trout seen plain in deepest pools.
In eager haste streams sprang from cliff to crag;
Appalling torrents whirled in mist and foam,
And cascades, bounding wild and jubilant,
Enthralled the heart with mingled joy and fear.

BOOK XIX

De Soto's Narrative continued—The lowlands reached—Honey is brought to the Spaniards—Discovery of the Tennessee River—Fording the rapid streams—Coosa and his dominions—Song of the Indian maidens—Coosa begs De Soto to abide in his realms—The Spanish soldiers also entreat De Soto to remain there, but he refuses, and the march is continued—The Spaniards enter the dominions of Tuscaloosa—The son of Tuscaloosa comes to meet the Spaniards first—The meeting with Tuscaloosa himself—He gives the strangers a cold greeting—He induces the Spaniards to accompany him to his chief town, Maubila—They ride through a beautiful country to this town—Tuscaloosa meditates treachery, and plans the massacre of De Soto and his band—De Soto is warned by his spies—The Indians receive the Spaniards at Maubila with pretended friendliness—But the Spaniards see that they are preparing for battle—The Indian council of war—Tuscaloosa advises the immediate destruction of the Spanish host, and is wildly applauded.

THE lowlands next we reached:⁶⁸ here natives came

With baskets of mulberries, and with jars
Of sweet and fragrant oil of hickory-nuts,
That smilingly they gave us. Here it was
They likewise brought mellifluous honeycombs,
Dripping with golden nectar; these we took
In wonder and delight, for never before
Had we seen honey in Floridian wilds.⁶⁹

Here many rivers we discovered. One,
A noble stream, far ampler than the rest,⁷⁰

Great Chieftain, from the landmarks thou hast given,
I know now as the river Tennessee.
We forded many another neighboring stream,
Rapid and wild, unlike its placid king,
That flowed along in majesty serene.
One, a fierce torrent rushing madly on,
Vortexing into whirlpools, seemed to dare
Our infantry to cross. Fearing its force,
A little art I used: our cavalry
I strung in line athwart the river-bed,
Each horse's head touching the horse in front.
So they the brunt of violence endured
From the swift waters: on their lower side,
Where ran the freshet with diminished power,
The men on foot went wading; clutching hold
Of stirrups, saddles, horses' manes and tails,
Their footing in the raging flood they held,
And aided thus, the further marge attained.

Among the forest princes greeting us,
Coosa reigned paramount.⁷¹ His kingdom lay
Many a league in breadth, and five long days
We journeyed through it ere the chief himself
We greeted. But our fame had far outsped
Our marches, and the prince with chosen peers
Came on to meet us and to welcome us
Unto his kingdom ere our feet had trod
Half through the great dominion. So at last,
A palanquin we spied, by dusky knights
Shouldered aloft, where sate the chief enthroned,
Stateliest of warriors, splendidest of youths.
He leaned on deerskin cushions: round his head
Were snowy plumes of wild swans and of cranes,
Surmounted by the feathers of the hawk

Outspreading lance-like. Marten skins were thrown
Lightly around his shoulders and his arms.
Dismounting from his palanquin, the prince
Smiling, approached. Superb, symmetrical,
His nude limbs, shapely hands and slender feet
Seemed wrought of russet copper; on his face
Bloomed adolescence glad and debonair.
Like does attending on a stately stag,
Tripped lovely daughters of the wilderness,
Following their chief with ever-watchful eyes.
With clustered pink azaleas in their hands,
And wreaths of starry yellow jessamine
Twined in the midnight of their streaming hair,
Came bevvies of enamored singing-girls,
Who trilled ecstatic lyrics to the king.
There followed these a throng of dancing maids,
Like bacchant beauties of the vintage-time,
With bloomy sprays of grape-vines garlanded.
Dark, liquid, stellar, were these damsels' eyes,
Their rounded, dimpled cheeks a rich maroon;
Their sweet firm breasts, curving in perfect grace,
Magnolia buds of tawny bronze appeared.
A wealth of spicy calycanthus buds,
Scattered from maidens' hands beneath our feet,
Crushed, yielding luscious fragrance. Then in a
 strain
Half-chant, half-song, spontaneous and wild,
The forest bonnibels my coming hailed:

“Through our western woodland manor floats thy
 red and saffron banner,
 Bringing dreams our bosoms harbored not before;
Through each vine-embowered byway, through each
 forest-shadowed highway

Glows thine armor like a dawn unknown of yore.
Where the oak arises solemn with its rugged wizard
column,
We can sight the gleam of Christian sword and
spear;
And before, clear-eyed and regal, like a dominating
eagle,
Comes the Leader who hath conquered Doubt
and Fear.

“In the years ere this we numbered, we have only
drowsed and slumbered;
Now we hearken to thy wild and thrilling call;
Thou hast braved the furious torrent, faced the wild
beast’s jaws abhorrent;
Thou hast come our simple bosoms to enthrall!
Let us ease thy feet of sandals, let us light thee
festive candles,
And regale thee with our simple forest cheer;
Let us bring thee fruits of yellow, red and purple,
sweet and mellow,
And a rustic banquet of the bear and deer.

“Thou hast marched where sands were sterile, sailed
where seas were big with peril;
But the toils shall be forgotten in this nest;
As we see thee tread before us, we upraise the joyful
chorus:
Weary stranger, here is welcome, here is rest!
Here thy handmaids long have waited, unendeared,
unmatched, unmated;
Now we scatter sweetest posies at thy feet:

Let thy countenance not darken; to our amorous
pleadings hearken;

Life and Love will not be ever young and sweet!

“Thou hast worn thy hands with labor, spent thine
arm with spear and sabre,

In thy weary quest for fortune and for fame;

Thou hast roved through mountain icelands, thou
hast roamed through southern spicelands,

In thy mad pursuit of wild, elusive game.

Ah, thy lofty brow grows wrinkled, in thy locks the
frost is sprinkled,

Yet the goal still glimmers far and far away!

See! thy friends of youth are scattered, and thy hopes
of youth are shattered:

Fast the night comes that will end thy glorious day!

“Leave the pagan shrine un plundered, leave the
rolling wave unsundered,

And forget the frightful combat's wild alarms;

Feel again the fires of boyhood, know again the old-
time joyhood

In the clasping and caressing of our arms!

Heed no more the cannon's clamor, battle-axe on
shield a-hammer;

Cast aside the helmet and the steely glove;

O, forget the lust for pillage in the peaceful arts of
tillage,

And become a conqueror on the field of Love!

“Like the pleading pipe of cricket in the yellowing
Autumn thicket,

Soon shall rise thy piteous plaint for youth's return.

What avails a glory deathless when thy pallid lips
are breathless?

It will never warm thine ashes in thine urn!
O, forget the drums a-rattle, and the clash of swords
in battle;

Let thy fret and fever ease to blissful calm;
Sail no more the ocean surges, seek no more the
sundown verges,
And forget the ceaseless striving for the palm."

Such was their salutation. Many days
We bided there, in feasting and in song
Dallying the hours away. Waking at last,
I saw that Spring had fled, while Summer's reign
Was flitting to the past. The Moon of Flowers,
Like a dead lily, shedding leaf by leaf
Her white corolla, faded from the skies:
The golden Corn-Moon, smitten by sultry heat,
Ripened for reaping in the harvest-fields
Twinkling on heights of heaven. Now sad-eyed Fall
Wandered the hazy hills, and so had come
Our time for leaving. Long the chieftain begged,
Saying, "Depart not: make our land your home.
Teach then our lads to ride the steed, and fight
With scaly armor that defies the spear,
And arms that hurl, like weapons of the heavens,
Thunder and lightning. We will teach thy youths
To snare the turkey, trap the bear; to run
Swifter than hart or hare; to kindle fires
Rubbing two sticks together; best of all,
Endurance of the cold and heat, of snow,
Of sleet, of rain,—how to win hardihood
Striving with Nature. Look upon our maids;
See, they are vigorous, they are comely: let
Thy young men spouse them. Wedded, they shall
rear

Sturdy and handsome children,—like their sires,
Wise in the secrets taught in books, and like
Their mothers, skilled in hidden lore of field
And flood and forest. Here abide, I pray."

I answered, "Noble Chief, thou speakest well;
But still our march must be resumed. Perchance,
In other times, after our task is done,
Returning, we may see thee here again,
And greet thee as our good friend, loved of old.
Now work unfinished calls us: and albeit
We sigh to bid farewell, depart we must."

My comrades wished to linger there; alone
I stood against them; though I longed for one,
One only, to uphold me, none appeared,
And so I found no comfort save in self.
But O, illustrious chieftain, it was well.
Let weaklings cry for help from other hands,
Or lean on other shoulders in their need;
The strong man flees for succor to himself,
And in his own soul finds the truest friend.
O, sympathy from loved ones may be sweet,
And guidance from a loving hand be good;
O, censure from a comrade may be just,
And praise from multitudes be fraught with cheer;
But in his own heart man finds surest strength,
Profoundest censure, highest-lifting praise.

Again they begged me stay, and all exclaimed,
"We never yet succeeded,—never shall."
I answered, "True; we may not gain the prize;
But though we never live to win Success,
And though we ever see her slip our hands,

Or laughing in derision out of reach,
Our hearts shall thrill with something sweeter far,—
The wild excitement born of hot pursuit!”

So, having answered them, and seeing all,
Though saddened, yet obedient to my will,
Through Coosa's realm we marched. Nearing its
bounds,

We reached a hamlet, which though rightfully
Under his sceptre, oft with treacherous arms
His lawful sway had stubbornly withstood.
A giant monarch, Tuscaloosa,⁷² ruled
The neighboring kingdom, and he sowed abroad
Among these subjects of his brother-prince
Disloyalty and discontent. Here came
To meet us from the pathway to the West,
A warrior, naked as a god from heaven
Scorning the fleecy drapery of the clouds;
Only upon his brow were scarlet plumes
Plucked from the ibis, while his careless hand
Swayed a spear lightly. Seeing him, we paused,
Dumb with amazement. For, though but a youth
Still in his April dawns, he towered on high,
A great-limbed giant: heads of tallest men
Reached only to his breast. Proudly erect,
Our admiration he constrained, albeit
His arrogance repelled. Dissevered not,
But knitted into one, his jetty brows
Fringed his mid-forehead like a trailing cloud,
And then like lordly outspread eagle-wings
Lifted in arcs imperious over his eyes.

“Black Panther I am called,” the youth began;
“My sire is Tuscaloosa, chief of chiefs.

Southward his sway ends only with the seas,
And westward ceases but with setting suns.
He sends me here to meet you. For a while
He tarries at a village in his realms
Three short day's-journey hence: the trail whereon
Ye are now marching leads you to that town.
He bids me ask you if you come his way?
If it be so, he waits to meet you. Sir,
What answer shall I bear him?" So he spake,
With confidence and ease beyond his years;
Yet through his royal tone and frank address
Flaunted a nameless air of insolence,
As if to taunt me. Still I spoke him fair,
Saying, "I thank thee and thy sire for all
This forethought for our good. Bear to the chief
My salutations. I shall keep this path,
And since he wills it, I shall meet him soon."
Then the lad left us, hurrying on before
To bear the message.

Taking up our march,

After three days we reached the little town
Where the chief tarried. Pitching first our tents,
The monarch next we sought, and soon descried
Ensconced before his wigwam on a mound,
An hundred of his peers surrounding him.
A giant mightier than his son, his face,
Ironie, grim and arrogant, inspired
Distrust and fear. With big-boned sinewy limbs,
Rugged and spare, like a gnarled leafless tree
High up he towered. Swift of glance, his eye,
Cruel and keen, would pierce you through and through.
And yet with all his airs of surliness,
Surely, methought, unless all signs misled,

Fraudful his thoughts were, and perfidious.
The forest emperor sate upon a throne
Of massive walnut hewn; about his feet
Strewed varicolored mats confusedly
In barbarous gaudiness; over his head,
A blue and yellow banner in the breeze
Fluttered and danced. A green palmetto-leaf,
Fluted and sharp-rayed, in a menial's hand
Lifted on high to screen him from the sun.
Another servant with an azure fan
Of wings of bluejays cooled the monarch's brow,
Waving the airy plumage slowly. Here
I came to meet him with extended hand;
He did not rise; easily insolent,
He glanced me over with a critic air,
Smiling with haughty and contemptuous lips.
My face flushed; standing awkwardly, abashed,
I dropped my hand. But hiding my chagrin,
And lifting my hand again, I grasped his own.
Though not invited, still I took the seat
Beside him: so we then conversed a while.

His speech was couched in fair expressions, yet
Beneath it I detected undertones
Boding but little good to me or mine.
Moscoso rode with mounted cavaliers
Into the open field before the mound;
There the knights galloped round and round, or leaped
Their horses over streams, or spurred them on
Up steepy banks, or in a mimic war
Tilted and tourneyed from opposing bands.
But Tuscaloosa sniffed in high disdain,
Muttering beneath his breath contemptuously
Words that I heard not, and yet understood.

Said I, "Great Chieftain, we are strangers, come
From lands afar, and in this wilderness
Blindly we wander. Wilt thou lend to me
A retinue of men, to point the way,
And help us bear our burdens through thy state?"
He scowled upon me like a thundercloud,
Snarling, "I serve not others; I myself
Receive, but yield to no man, servitude."
I bit my lip, and frowned: so then, the chief,
Seeing me nettled, after an anxious pause
Long as five heart-beats, added warily,
"Go with me to Maubila, my chief town,
And there the aid thou seekest shall be given."

So we proceeded slowly on our march,
The chief accompanying. Along the trail
Grapes hung in wild profusion; juicy plums
Scattered in red and yellow on the ground.
One comrade, wandering forth to gather fruit,
Was lost; we never pressed his hand again.
Later, another comrade went astray:
Two days we waited for him, and we scoured
All forest depths to find him, but in vain.
Sure was I that these men, through treacherous wiles,
The savages had murdered: but their chief,
Shrugging his shoulders, growled, "How should I
know?"

Am I, or you, the guardian of your men?"
This nettled me again, but still I choked
Resentment down, grimly my peace observing.
Upon the way, an Indian showed a dirk
Which once a Christian of Narvaez's band
Unto this region bore. This Christian knight,
(So spake the dusky holder of the prize,)

By Tuscaloosa's tribesmen had been slain:
So here again a warning sign we read.

All through the journey Tuscaloosa sent
His men before, saying, "They will prepare
A joyous welcome for you, and will raise
A band of laborers who will lend you aid."
But I, distrusting him, sent on before
Two Indian slaves as spies, whispering, "Mark well
All things upon the way: enter the town;
Watch every movement of the habitants,
And then, returning ere we reach its gates,
Tell to me all that ye have heard and seen."
One morning, ere our journey's end, the spies
Returning, met us. Beckoning me aside,
In agitation, and with lowered tones,
Said they, "Beware! The people of the town
Are arming secretly; women and men
Join in war-dances. In their crafty smiles
They can not hide their hate. Much do we fear
Their treacherous hearts: Master, be on thy guard!"
But still we rode with laughter on our way,
Forgetful of the whispers of the spies.
I saw that Tuscaloosa grimly smiled
With most unwonted wealth of courtesy,
Yet even that omen roused me not to see
The dangers that were fast surrounding us.

The chief beside me rode a fiery barb
From our own stud. Proudly the courser pranced,
Yet, mindful of his royal charge, he curbed
His savage temper, and revealed his joy
In being mastered by the forest king.
Fair was the sylvan scene, and fairer still

The rural prospects that relieved the woods
With fields of corn and pumpkins, peas and beans.
We doubled steepy hills, scaled airy heights,
And saw deep valleys, through whose azure haze
Sparkled swift streams like jeweled necklaces.
Ah, well might Indian braves have loved that land,
And sighed to leave it, though their eyes in death
Should open on the Happy Hunting Grounds!
An eagle passed above us; at our feet
Flitted his shadow; Tuscaloosa frowned;
I, at the concurrence of that shadow and frown,
Started; for both the eagle and king
Roved the war-path, ready to seize their prey!

We reached Maubila.⁷³ In a fertile plain
The village rose. Amazed, we saw its walls,
Great barricades of heavy logs, enwrapped
With snake-like monstrous vines. These logs and
vines,
Often set upright, often had taken root,
And wreathed the battlements luxuriantly
In leafy, long festoons and tufts of green.
And there were loopholes where the archers aimed,
And here and there were rising lofty towers,
Where watchers might survey the whole wide plain.

As I with Tuscaloosa neared the place,
Musicians came and piped upon their flutes;
Lithe, lissom damsels, wearing on their brows
Chaplets of woodbine, scattered at our feet
Bignonia sprays of scarlet. Following these,
Tripped other maids, who blithely danced and sang,
Like peasant girls in rustic scenes of Spain.
So greeting us with lightsome jollities,

And singing, dancing, fluting gayly still,
Into the city gates they led us. Here,
Dumfounded, as we looked about, we saw
Long buildings like huge barracks: each, we thought,
In its vast hall a thousand men with ease
A lodging might have given. In alarm,
Before the dancing or the singing ceased,
Or pipers ceased to pipe, I glanced above,
And saw unnumbered scowling faces peer
From rifts and loopholes. Through the open door
Of a great hall built level with the street,
I saw their crafty warriors slipping spears
And bows and arrows under leaves of palm.
But I said nothing; for I knew, though late,
The deadly danger that encompassed us.
Now all my coolness, all my self-command,
And self-repression must be brought to bear!

It still was early morning:⁷⁴ yet betimes,
As if to ward beforehand all dispute,
The giant monarch called to Ortiz, saying,
"Within yon house your governor, and those
Commanders who in rank are nearest him,
May lodge when night descends. The rest must go
Without the city walls; there they remain;
We have not room for all within the town."
So Ortiz brought the message. Instantly
I saw the snare: I, with my trustiest men,
The highest in the force, sleeping alone,
Surrounded by the wakeful savages
When night's deep gloom might aid their treachery,
Would all be murdered. When the dawn should come,
The Christian army, dazed and leaderless,
Would fall a prey to frantic savages.

I sought out Tuscaloosa; finding him,
Keenly I looked him in the eye, and said,
"Here there is room, and room enough for all;
Here I and all my host shall sleep to-night;
None but the slaves and steeds remain without."
He glared upon me viciously; but soon
He lowered his eyes, abashed for once, and left,
Muttering I knew not what. Then he turned round,
As if to beard me: yet he checked himself,
Scowling and mumbling, and then strode away.

My soldiers all the while had peered about,
And brought alarming stories; for they said:
"Ten thousand warriors, eager for the fray,
In arms are quartered at the barracks. See!
Old women, with the children, all are gone;
The women we behold, great Amazons,
Stand ready for the combat, like their men.
The grounds about the village all are cleared,
Leaving an open field to mow us down."

That hour the Paynims in their council-house
Debated whether they should strike at once,
Or wait for nightfall with her traitorous glooms,
And slay us then. Eager to learn the plot,
Anasco slipped unnoticed through the town,
And reached the central wigwam; through a chink
He peered within; there he beheld great throngs
Of warriors, and he listened while they spoke.
Some stood for one plan, some another: last,
The chieftain, Tuscaloosa, rose. Then he:

"Ye braves! Amidst our happy land there strides
The insolent invader. His design

Is conquest: every wigwam fire he seeks
To quench in darkness: every hunting-ground
He plans to seize and hold. If ye sit still
With folded hands, your squaw shall be his slave,
Your daughter be his concubine, your son
Food for his bloodhounds. For the pale-face comes
With new and frightful weapons; in his hands
He carries lightnings, and his murderous bow
Shouts thunder; he is mounted on a beast
More frightful than himself, whose hoofs are horn,
Whose cry is fife-like, and whose eyes flash fire;
Whose mane streams forth in fury when the drum
Calls men to battle. Harken to me, braves!
These strangers from afar are sorcerers,
To whom the demons who would crush our race
Have given hellish powers. We have no chance
To win against them, save through cunning: yea,
By stealth, and stealth alone, our hands may strike
A death-blow. Some have urged us to forbear,
Saying, 'The pale-face comes a peaceful guest,
Trusting our honor, and should so be spared.'
Aye! so in peace the deadly rattlesnake
Creeps through your doorway, crawls along the floor,
And coils in quietude beside your hearth,
Warming his cold and torpid blood! *That* guest,
Trusting your tender mercy, do you spare?
O, blame me not for dallying with these fiends,
And smiling to their faces, for I knew
That open warfare on our part would mean
Destruction to us all: the Great Spirit knows
That all the while I bowed and smirked and cringed
Before the robbers, in my heart I raged,
Longing to smite them till they swam in blood!
What! do you blame the opossum, when he feigns

Death, stiffening his limbs and shutting fast his eyes,
Only to slip away when once you turn
Your back upon him? He is weak, you strong;
Therefore his cunning lends that one device
Whereby he thwarts you, and his life he saves.
When some barefooted urchin's clumsy bow,
Aimed at a timid dove upon her nest,
Misses its mark, blame ye that weakling bird
Which flutters down, pretending to be stricken,
And struggles as if wounded, running on,
And on and on, but ever out of reach,
So that the boy, still following, is at last
Beguiled afar, and so forgets the nest
Which else his hand had plundered? Do ye blame
That dove for cheating in defense of home?

"This is the hour to strike! The foe dreams not
That soon we seek the war-path; at his ease
He lolls about unarmed: rush forth and smite!
Is there a coward here who would not die
For freedom, for his fireside, for his honor,
For the God his fathers worshiped? Ye have seen
The slender little thrasher wildly rush
At prowling dogs, and fly in the face of men,
Fluttering with passion, when they drew too nigh
His brood of callow fledgelings. O how frail
That little creature! yet the monstrous dog,
The giant man, invading his dominion,
He dares to beard. Go ye, and let that bird,
That tiny bird, teach you its patriotism!

"Some say that we may fail; that deviltry
Of arms that vomit fire will make a jest
Of simple bows and arrows; be it so!

Better to fight and die and turn to dust,
Than living, eat that dust, a cowering slave.
They say that when a mock-bird's puny young
Are taken from their forest-home and caged,
The parents follow to that wigwam door
Where they are prisoned; if the cage be hung
Without the walls, the elders then will come
With poisonous berries in their beaks;⁷⁵ with these,
Their shrill papposes, ravenous and agape,
They feed: so they their darling offspring slay,
Rather than see them hopelessly foredoomed
As lifelong captives. Thus then, let us choose
Death for ourselves, and death for all we love,
Above a life of slavery and of shame!"

When he had ended, multitudes with shouts
Thundered their approbation. So the plot
Was to bear fruit in speedy massacre.

BOOK XX

De Soto's Narrative concluded—De Soto sends Ortiz three times to Tuscaloosa, inviting him to eat at his table, but the chief delays his coming—Disputes arise, and so the Battle of Maubila begins—Thousands of Indians, and many Spaniards, are killed—The Spaniards beguile the Indians outside the walls, and slay many—Don Carlos is slain—The Spaniards then break through the walls—Four Christians imprisoned in the town, are rescued—Tuscaloosa, through the advice of his friends, takes to flight—But Black Panther, his son, remains, and is slain by Gallegos—De Soto's nephew, Don Francisco, is then slain by the savages—Maubila is set on fire—Native women seize arms, and fight and die with the men—Only a few are made captives—Maubila is laid in ashes, and the last warrior hangs himself—The Spaniards are victorious, but their success is dearly bought—Nearly all their worldly goods are lost—De Soto realizes that his fortunes are on the wane, and he suffers great agony of mind—Poignant sufferings of the Spaniards—Disaffection and disloyalty are rife—De Soto goes in disguise among his men, and hears their mutinous converse—He learns that the fleet has come to his aid—Still, he determines not to return South and meet the ships from Cuba, but to march North—The advance is begun—The army enters the country of the Chickasaws—De Soto expresses his unalterable determination to pursue his plans to the end, and so finishes his Narrative.

THE morn's repast was hastily prepared,
And then I sped Juan Ortiz to the chief,
Begging him come to sit with us at meat.
The chief would not appear, but sent a brave

Who said to Ortiz, "By and by, our King
Will come to join you. Bid your leader wait."
But time passed; Tuscaloosa hasted not;
So Ortiz went again, and brought once more
The same short message. But the hour was late,
The viands waited, and I sent again:
The chief's attendant, coming to the door
Where Ortiz stood the third time, cried, "Thou
dog!
Still must thou vex us? By the sun and moon!
Darest thou command our King to come in haste?
Go, tell thy lord to tarry longer still."

When Ortiz had departed, this same churl
Who had given the scornful answer, not content
With words of insult, turned and aimed a bow
Toward a group of Spaniards in the square.
Gallegos, who by chance was standing nigh,
Whipped his sword out, and cleaved the wretch in
twain.

So now began the battle. A young lad
Foremost among the Indians, flung a spear
That struck the Spaniard's helm, but glanced aside,
Broken upon the steel: so then the youth,
Seizing a fragment of the shattered spear,
Battered Gallegos with his sturdy blows,
Till the Iberian with a vicious thrust
Pierced through the stripling's heart. From every
side
Hurtled sharp yells, and shrieks and whoops and
shouts,
Like clangor of the anvils hammer-smitten
In sooty Vulcan's deafening blacksmith-forge.

The natives rushed upon us in a mass;
So great their numbers were, that in the press
Their own vast multitudes impeded them,
Leaving no play for weapons in their hands.
I heard the cries, but rushing forth, at once
Deep-inundated in the human flood,
Struggled in vain to extricate myself.
We were all pushed before them. Whirling round,
Shouldered and elbowed, beaten, kicked and cuffed,
And well-nigh lifted from the ground, we fought
And strove against the overwhelming surge;
But yet like helpless babes in childish fury,
Panting, dusty and bloody, through the gates
Our men were knocked and hurled. Without the
walls

That morning we had tethered all our steeds;
So, rushing to these as fast as feet could scamper,
We leaped upon them, though in such hot haste,
Not lingering to untie the knots, we cut
Their bridles with impatient swords. Our slaves,
Seized by the foe, were taken into the town,
And there, well-armed with clubs, or bows and arrows,
Or spears or falchions wrested from our hands
In the wild struggle through the village streets,
Were turned against us. Many of our band
Staggered with wounds, and others reeled in death
Before our horses could be reached. But now,
Springing upon my steed, a charge I led
Against the raging savages. Rushing together,
We clashed like thunderbolts from heaven; then lance
Shivered on lance; splintered the spear on spear;
The Indian's hickory club and tomahawk
Shocked on the Christian's harness; flaming swords,
Upwhirled in knightly hands, fell whistling down,

Cleaving the crests of stalwart foresters.
Our fearful onslaught, with resistless might
Hurled back the dusky braves: stout cavaliers
Sabred and speared them, while infuriate steeds
Pounded and pawed them into the gory dust.
Our arquebuses now began to speak
With cracking, crashing, and with clattering,
Like stamping hoofs upon an iron bridge;
Their death-bolts hurried through the startled air,
Strewing barbarians on the bloody grass
In twisting, writhing, tossing multitudes,
Dying, or rent with anguish. Smitten with terror,
Running and scuffling and crowding frenziedly,
Leaving their dead and dying, fled the foe
In through the narrow city gates.

Once there,

Grown insolent with safety, they regained
The courage that so lately all had lost:
For, reappearing on the barricades
Above us, they uplifted to our view
Our garbs, and srips and wallets left behind,
Shouting, "Come on, ye cowards, if ye dare,
And take them from us!" Vexed we stood, for now
The clothing and the armor that we wore
Were all we owned on earth. But even then
Gladly would I have called my knights away,
And left the village and the realm forever,
Had I not learned that, prisoned in a house
Amidst the village, four of our own band
Were pressed for very life; so I resolved
To save these comrades, or to die myself.
Among these four, one was an Indian girl,
In slavery once, but later freed, and now

Baptized a Christian; one my much-loved page,
A tender lad of barely sixteen years,
Besides a priest and friar, whose good deeds
Through months of trial had revealed them both
Truly as men of God.

Fleeing for shelter,
An empty hut they had gained, and barred the door.
There was a sword amongst them; taking this,
The brave boy lifted it in readiness
For any warrior breaking through; two clubs
Were clutched by priest and friar, and they stood
Each side the door, ready likewise to smite
Whoever dared to batter in. So thus
In deadly danger, far from friends, they stood,
Encompassed by the raging savages.

Seeing the red men dared not venture out,
But mocked us still in safety from their walls,
I sought to lure them forth by strategy.
Slowly our band fell backward: presently
A few barbarians issued through the gates,
Mocking us in retreat: next, as our band
Retreated further, nearer came the braves,
With piercing war-whoops; simulating fear,
Our backs we turned, and striking spur to steed,
Galloped like cowards hurriedly in flight.
Our feint succeeded; with derisive shouts
The savages pursued. Turning at last,
We brought our musketry to bear: and then
Like flaming hydras, from whose bellowing jaws
Leap smoke and flame, those fearful iron arms
Volleyed destruction. Sweeping all the field,
We felled them like a herd of startled goats,

Heaping their dead far higher than before.
 Still they fought bravely: many of our band
 Their archers wounded, some they slew. So now,
 Slowly we forced them to their walls again.
 Don Carlos, husband of my sister, here
 Was sorely pressed; an arrow pierced the flank
 Of his brave steed; the warrior sought to pluck
 The arrow forth; himself he thus exposed,
 And so a dart transfixed him in the neck,
 Whereat he died. No man in all our host
 Was so much loved in life or mourned in death.

Now I perceived the ramparts must be stormed,
 Or else our friends imprisoned in the town
 Must meet a frightful doom. Lifting loud cheers,
 Three places in the walls we next attacked;
 Some climbed the logs and gained the inner side;
 Some, wielding axes, cut the ramparts through;
 I, leaping from my horse, rushed to one gate,
 Hurling my shoulder on it; creakingly
 It reeled and swayed, yet still it yielded not:
 Again I hurled against it, and once more
 Groaning and sweating, found my struggles vain.
 Undaunted, soon the effort I renewed,
 Pushing against it till my shoulders ached:
 Then, like a stubborn foe yielding at last,
 Who yielding, yet returns a parting blow,
 Open it flew, throwing me to the ground.
 Leaping on foot again, and mounting my steed,
 With my brave lads I galloped into the town.
 From loopholes in the houses, slings and bows
 Pelted us fast with flying darts and stones
 That hissed and whined and whistled angrily,
 And pierced and stung and smote us, till the blood

Dimmed every harness. But not swerving, still
We galloped onward, anxiously intent
Alone on reaching that beleaguered hut
Where stood our friends at bay.

The savages

Had sought to break the door down; but the bar,
Of toughest hickory, like a sturdy friend
To the last faithful, each assault withstood.
The imps then climbed the roof; quickly its thatch
Was being scattered; soon a gaping hole
Let the light in: the white men, looking up,
Started, beholding diabolic grins
On swarthy faces peering down below.
Ready the Indians stood to leap within,
And the four Christians lost all hope; but now,
Just as the sword of Fate was poised to smite,
They heard our calls without; half mad with joy,
Flinging the door ajar, they speeded to us.
Hard as I was from years of buffetings,
Sad as I was for loved companions slain,
Pressed as I was with foes on every side,
Dim grew mine eyes with mists of joy; then laughing,
I wrung the hand of damsel, priest and friar;
I took the boy in arms and kissed his brow.

With courage leonine struggled and fought
The red men, hour by hour. Not so their King;
For, as the combat grew, his friends approached
The giant, saying, "Mighty Chief, no man
Can tell the issue of this fearful day,
And if we lose thee, all is lost: seeing this,
We beg thee not to linger with us here.
Haste from the village to our forest-hold,

Where the old women and the children wait;
If we prevail, we will rejoin thee there;
But if we fall, unscathed wilt thou remain,
To gather up the remnants of our tribe.
Here thou canst aid but little: but if Chance
Turns her face from us, we shall have thee still
To tend the few survivors of our race,
Who else would perish from the world." Perplexed,
Long stood the monarch, hesitating: oft
He shook his head, refusing: but at last
His recreant spirit yielded. So this man,
The sire of all this frightful brood of ills,
Forgetful of his forest chivalry,
Shifted to other shoulders all the woes
Through his own sins begotten. Hastily
Seizing a scarlet cloak, a helm with plumes,
And the like tinsel finery that our knights
Had lost that morning, with some favored peers
He speeded from the town, and in the wilds
Purchased his safety through inglorious flight.⁷⁶

But now Black Panther, son of him who had fled,
Nobly redeemed his race's fame. The lad,
Superb and masculine, disdaining fear,
Rushed to the fray, and many a Christian rued
The ardor of his prowess. Noon had come,
And still the brave youth, like a great bronze tower
Endowed with motion, high above the host
Of his brown comrades loomed, and here or there,
Wherever fiercest was the fray, he strode,
Smiting and slaying. For the loftiest plumes
Nodding on helmets of the tallest knights
Barely might brush his shoulder, and his arm,
Like the great branch of a sky-piercing tree,

Swayed by a hurricane, back and forth swung,
Dealing destruction. In the Christian host,
Gallegos by his deeds of valor won
The right of leadership above his peers,
All following as he urged them on. He hewed
His way through hillocks of the Paynim dead,
And ten roods distant, face to face, he viewed
Black Panther, boldest of the foresters.

As the young giant looked and saw the knight,
More insolent his air became; and yet
Despite his arrogance, who could but admire
The splendor of his morn of manhood? Bare
Of armor, to our flaming arms exposed,
His great brown limbs, curving with naked grace,
Made such a target, that our musketeers
Forbore to fire upon a mark so sure,
Deeming such act dishonor. On he came,
Smiling in haughtiness: his mated brows
Their lordly eagle-wings above his eyes
Proudly uplifted, as upon that day
We first beheld him. Now Gallegos cried,
"Prince, yield the day! Gallantly hast thou fought,
But hopelessly. See! thousands of thy friends
Lie dead around thee. Volleying arms of fire,
If still thou temptest, thou canst not escape.
Surrender! We will let thee go in peace."
But unsubdued, the lad cried, "I yield not
To men, nor even to devils like yourselves.
Defend thyself!"

Backward the stripling bends,
And whirling round his brawny arm, he flings
A mighty spear; hissing, it flies amain,

Striking the breast-plate of the pale-faced knight
With force terrific; on that faithful steel,
The flint-head, broader than a giant's palm,
Shatters to pieces; but its fearful blow
Knocks the Castilian down, taking his breath,
And rolling him in the dust. Leaping on foot,
Gallegos fronts his foe again: the youth,
Seizing an arrow, aims it from a bow
That, save himself, no mortal man may bend.
With a twang malignant and a cynic snarl,
Forth flies the angry dart; the knight's left arm
It pierces, but so rapid is its flight,
So great the might that wings it, that its barb,
The reed itself, and even the plume behind,
Shoot onward through the flesh, leaving the bone
Unshattered and unharmed, then speed beyond,
And bury in a far-off wall. But still
Stands the Hispanic soldier unsubdued,
Though sorely wounded. So the frenzied lad
Snatches a tomahawk from a comrade's hand,
A bolt more dreadful than the hammer of Thor,
And brandishing the weapon round in air,
Comes rushing with a frightful war-whoop. Now
Swiftly the axe above the Spaniard swings,
And whistling, cuts the air to cleave his head.
But the lithe pale-face quickly bends aside,
Evading, and the weapon wounds but air,
Thwarted in fury. As the young man sways,
Breathless, and spent with his own wasted force,
Gallegos, with his right arm, that is still
Sturdy and active, wields his sword; it severs
The giant's throat, and half his neck, in twain:
Then with a hollow guttural murmur, falls
The mightiest, noblest of the red men, dead.

Maddened with grief at seeing their champion fall,
Like hell-hounds dash the Indians on our lines:
Onward they come, with wild, infuriate yells,
Their nostrils wide-distended, eyes blood-shot,
Teeth gnashing, dusky faces wan with rage:
How uselessly! Volley on volley sweeps
Legion on naked legion into the dust:
Others come further; fighting hand to hand,
They smite against our sabres, and receive
The deadly blades, writhing in agony.

But not without revenge they fell; for here
My nephew, Don Francisco, by a lance
Swayed from a savage arm, thrust through the
 breast,
Died ere our hands could lift him. Hard beset
By foes ourselves, no time we had for tears.
As I, upstanding in my stirrups, aimed
To throw a spear, an arrow from afar
Drove through my thigh, and fastened; rankling there,
Keen was its pain, as though a red-hot blade
Bit through the quivering flesh. I let it be,
Having not even chance to draw it forth:
My saddle wrenched and gored the wound: so then,
Still standing in my stirrups, doggedly
I fought, despite mine anguish, to the end.⁷⁷

The Indians pelting us from every house,
While, unespied themselves, escaping harm,
"The village must be set on fire!" I cried.
Into a neighboring lodge a Spaniard rushed,
And snatched a streaming firebrand; coming back,
The torch he wielded swiftly: at his hands
A score of wigwams now enwreathed in flames.

These, reared of seasoned pine, and thatched with
straw,
Were soon upblazing like a cardboard town;
The barricades were next on fire; ere long,
Wild grew the heavens with clouded smoke and flame.
With fierce tormenting thirst our lips were parched:
We sought a pool: though crimson to its depths
With blood of comrades and of enemies,
We gulped the curdled waters greedily.

And now more frightful still the carnage grows:
Pierced is the air with shrieks and wails: deep groans
From dying men the living men appall;
The fighters yell and shout; great thunder-peals
From death-charged muskets cleave the shrinking air.
With sword-gleams in his eyes, and in his hands
Lightnings that scourge the world, Havoc is King,
Striding triumphant. Floating far and wide
In pitchy smoke, his grisly hair and beard
Scatter strange darkness from their tangled strands,
Making drear twilight ere the noon's decline.

The panting foresters, begrimed with dust,
And blood-splashed from their wounds, in fiery mass
Roll on us but to feed our dripping blades;
Our firearms boom and roar, sweeping the field,
But brave survivors seek the combat still.
The smoke has blotted out the heavens; the sun
Glows dimly through it like a red-hot shield;
The dust uprears in clouds; with smoke and flames
A vast Tartarean canopy it forms;
Death stalks gigantic through that pall-hung sky;
Well might one dream that Gabriel's trumpet blows
To wake the whole world to its Judgment Day.

Nigh all the dusky knights have perished: so
With Amazonian zeal brave women come
To take their place in fight. Slender and tall,
With queenly forms, with beauteous hands and feet,
Limbs that are swift and strong, with glossy hair
Streaming like midnight palpitant with stars,
With meteoric eyes flashing in rage
Athwart the black depths of their last despair,—
Who could behold them rushing to their doom,
Nor feel a pang of sorrow? Who could view
Those rounded breasts—those twin poetic peaks
Sacred to Love and Joyance, whence should gush
The sweet warm springs of life for lips of babes,
But now must be incarnadined with blood,—
And not be moved to pity? Not for stings
From tiny pearls in mouths of infancy,
Nor for the patting of soft little hands,
Those breasts should thrill, but the keen sabre's fangs
Would bite less gently, and would stroke to slay:
These, that should be Love's nest and lover's rest,
Would soon be spoils of the great Conqueror,
Insatiate Death!

“Surrender! We will spare
You and your people, one and all!” we cry.
Scornful, they laugh, and rush upon us. Ah,
With what a pang we face them! Yet in vain
We seek to spare them. We must smite and slay,
Or else ourselves be slain. Some rush to fate
Against the sharp-edged falchion; some are strewn
In a red harvest by the flaming tubes
That arm the pale-face with omnipotence.
Only a remnant yields: the rest, untamed,
Finding themselves alone,—their sires and sons,

Their spouses and their lovers and their brothers
Scattered in death around them,—with their homes
Burning, or black in ruin,—spurn our pleas
To yield themselves, and laughing frenziedly,
Leap into their flaming wigwams, dying free.

Now every savage warrior who at morn
Had raised the war-whoop, lies among the dead,—
All but one patriot! This man climbs a tower,—
The last one on the blazing village walls,—
And there, surrounded by the smoke and flames,—
Limned sharply in a gaunt black silhouette
Against the red sun sinking in the west,—
After nine hours spent fighting for his home,—
He snaps the bowstrings from his useless bow,
And ties one end around the pinnacle;
A noose he fashions at the nether end,
Slipping it quickly round his neck; this done,
Shaking his fist, he yells defiance still,
Leaps out, and hangs himself before our eyes.

Three thousand of the Paynim dead we found,⁷⁸
But many more had perished in the flames,—
How many, who could say? Great was our dole;
Among our lost were bravest, truest men;
Of those who lived, no man was free of hurt,
And many limped and groaned with grievous wounds
From temple unto toe. So great their force,
The Indian shafts had pierced even tempered steel,
And sunk in breasts beneath it. In the fray
Nuño de Tobar bore a thick, stout lance
Of seasoned ash; an arrow split it through,
And midway ceased its flight: so thus transfixed,
The lance of warfare seemed a cross of peace.

Our steeds were slain, or limping stiff with wounds:
Half of our herd of swine lay slaughtered: scores
Of wallets with our garments had been burned.
Lost were our drugs, our leech's instruments,—
Lost when so sorely needed! Half our tools
Lay buried in the smoking ruins. All
The pearls of Cofachiqui had evanished,—
A priceless treasure kings could not replace.
The wines and wafers of the sacrament,
The altars, chalices, and priestly robes,—
All holy aids to worship now were gone.
Thereafter, priests in deerskin vestments stood
On grassy earth, under the forest trees,
Without religion's wonted implements,
But yet with undiminished love and zeal,
And there in Nature's own cathedral, raised
Their voices in devotion unto God.

Our linen gone, to fashion bandages
For wounds of those who lived, we robbed the dead,
Stripping with tears the garments from cold forms
Of our own slain companions. Faithful steeds
That once had borne us proudly to the field,
Now butchered by the foe, starving we seized,
And greedily devoured,—repulsive food,
Yet welcome in our fearful straits. In truth
Our needs were piteous! We had lost our scrips:
The richest of us trudged with gaping shoon,
And clouted hose and doublet: hung with rags,
Bareheaded and barefooted, others still
Shivered in frosts of cold November nights.
Cassocks and surcoats lost, our knights perforce
Slept in their armor. With unpillowed heads
The wounded lay and suffered unrelieved

Of half their burning pangs: for all their friends
Who sought to nurse them, maimed and weak themselves,
Could bring but feeble aidance. Neither oils
Nor ointments, balms not balsams, nor even yet
The simples of the fields that ancient crones
Gather for hurts of men, were now at hand.
No dainty food, no downy couch, was here
To woo the sick man back to health: but now,
Bedded on chilly earth, our dying friends,
Moaning and tossing in delirious dreams,
Pleaded and begged for aid we could not give.

Dazed with despair, dimly I saw that Fate
Had now betrayed me; empty and upturned
Was left the cornucopia of my life.
My Sun of Destiny that once had blazed
On heights meridian, in a sea of blood
Was setting, and would sink through gulfs of gloom
To the dark nadir of the underworld.

That night I walked the dreadful battle-field,
And heard the sighs and groans of dying men,
Like bitter moans of melancholy winds.
The wild, defoliated Autumn boughs
Wrung twisted bony fingers over me,
Like wizards calling down some awful curse.
Dead friends I saw, and friends 'n throes of death;—
Myself I blamed for every pang endured.
Among the others lay a dying lad,
Whose eyes had scarce beheld a score of Junes;
His cheeks, once like a vermeil afterglow,
To stainless alabaster white had paled;
The Dust of Earth was now demanding him

For dark, oblivious realms of nothingness!
His downy virgin lips had never known
The poignant sweetness of a lover's kiss;
The soft corolla of expanding youth
Lay trampled; never in ecstatic bliss
Should fond endearments woo his limpid eyes,
Nor heart of maiden claim him for her own!
I took the beauteous boy in trembling arms,
Wiping the bloodstains from his marble brow,
And the dust from his quivering lips: I wept
Above the dying lad, and felt adjudged
The guilty one, who with a reckless hand
Had clipped his fragile silken thread of life,
And brought to end his fair, ephemeral days.

That night we buried many; at the dawn
Still others died, but not till eve returned
Dared we entomb them, for some enemy
Might find and desecrate their sepulchre.
The next night came; we buried then the rest.
Amidst the solemn gloom, with steady beat
Spades crunched and grated; in hoarse monotones
Gruffly the diggers whispered; but the howl
Of ravenous wolves drowned every noise they made.
The graves we flattened; then with moss and leaves
We hid them from the stealthy, searching eyes
Of prowling foresters. Ah, what a pang
It cost to leave them in that wilderness!
For here forsaken must they ever bide,
Lone exiles in a world of savages.
They who yestreen had followed, light of foot,
The undulating banner to the field,
Should never hail its dawn-bright hues again.
May moons would shimmer on translucent rills;

December moons would shiver over snow:
Æolian harps of Autumn here would sigh
Through withered leaves and bare boughs for the lost;
Spring winds in bugle-tones would call the dead
To rise again, but ever call in vain.

Now disaffection and disloyalty,
When faith was needed most, arose; and soon
Like obstinate evil insects on the wing,
Whining and buzzing angrily, mine ears
Sorely they plagued. To learn, and learn at once
The whole truth, I resolved, in borrowed garb
To wander through the army, and to hear,
Myself disguised, my critics undisguised.
So, one night, to a slave I threw my gear,
And took his own for mine.⁷⁹ Appareled thus,
And muffled, unto other tents I stole.
Dark was the night, and by the camp-fire's gleams
Drear, dull and flickering, none could see my face
Save dimly; thus the soldiers knew me not,
Deeming me but a peasant of the ranks.
The royal treasurer, Juan Gaytun, stood
With his hands behind him as he warmed their palms
In the warm glow of pine-tree faggots: crowds
Of low-browed surly men surrounded him.
As I approached, Gaytun with an angry air
Was loudly talking: coming nearer still,
I heard him saying, "To this man we call
Our leader, must we render up our thanks
For this, our present plight: to him alone
We owe these depths of misery. Powers of heaven!
For injuries tenfold less than these, have men
Rebelled, and slain a hundred despots: *now*
No creature dares to rise; but like a pack

Of whipped and whining curs, these tattered oafs,
Calling themselves Castilians, bow before
His footstool, begging to be lashed again!"

"He speaks the truth! Gaytun speaks truth!" exclaimed

A score of angry men: continuing then,

"We should have stayed in Coosa's land," he
snarled:

"*There* was abundance: *there* a friendly hand
Offered us welcome and deferred our march.
Think how this wild impostor dragged us on
From lands of plenty to this desert waste,—
To raggedness—hunger—starvation—death!"

"Why left we Cofachiqui?" asked another;

"Think of the treasures we abandoned there!

Think of the wild-geese, quails, and hares, and corn,
And now behold us nibbling at the husks!"

"If in our veins there coursed one drop of blood
Not wholly pusillanimous," Gaytun hissed,

"To-morrow we would rise in mutiny.

Great God, *we* pose as men! No, no, not men,
Not even thralls or helots, serfs or slaves,
But idly-grunting, sluggish, herded swine!"

I stole away, but hid my wrath, and told
No man of that which I had heard.

Ere long,

There came to me in secret from my scouts,
The tidings that our fleet had now returned,
And waited in the harbor lately found
By Maldonado. But I steeled my heart
Against returning south: that was retreat!
My men were famished; here toward the north
Lay countries of abundance; to the south

Were tangled brakes and marshes, which our band,
Attempting to rejoin its friends again,
Could scarce ford over. Furthermore, I knew
That should we ever reach the waiting fleet,
Juan Gaytun and his horde would mutiny,
And so our expedition there would end
In failure and disgrace. But over all,
My own proud spirit loathed that word, Retreat.
God! after all my pains, was I at last
To make admission outright of defeat,
To bend my head, slink back in poverty,
Beaten and scourged, and sheepish with my shame?
Was I to be a butt for ridicule,
A jest for enemies, reproach to friends?
I might have joyed to see those friends again,
But not while in misfortune! We are glad
To show ourselves to those we cherish most,
When Fortune smiles; but when she frowns upon us,
Giving us threadbare raiment, hangdog looks,
And all the odious marks of beggary,
We shun them as a peacock shuns the sight
When rude hands pluck the proud bird's gorgeous
train.

Often I trod the sad November woods,
And there, surrounded by the falling leaves,—
Withered and blighted, like my dying hopes,—
Lifting my hands to chill autumnal skies,
I swore that, though all trumpets blown on earth
By all the lips of men, should call me home,
Still, only one of two fates should be mine,—
To go in triumph, or to bide here dead.

Great Chief! Man's destiny must be obeyed:
I heard its call as rivers hear the sea,

Drawn onward, surely, irresistibly.
I knew not if it called me to success,
Or if it merely beckoned me to doom,—
I only knew my spirit must obey!
He who is man indeed never must yield
To that which turns him from the Inner Voice;
Obeying that, he needs to fear no foe.
No man is conquered till he owns defeat;
For he who, though defeated, knows it not,
Never can be defeated in the end.

Much have I suffered: in the days to come
Perchance still greater sufferings wait me: yet
I murmur not. For all our pangs and joys,
Defeats and victories, toils and hours of ease,
Famines and feastings, welcomes and rebuffs,
Blunders and sins, and glories and despairs,
Are pages of the book, Philosophy,
Given to teach the one great lesson, Life.
As flows the Gaudiana underground,
Leaving bright skies and groping through the night,
Only to rise and greet the day once more,
So shall the Spirit sink to Stygian glooms,
To rise in noonday splendor greater still.

From seeds of sorrow sown in soil of doubt,
Gendered by suns of passion, fanned by sighs,
Watered with tears, and fertilized by grief,
Sucking its splendor from our own heart's blood,
After long waiting, comes the purple flower
That marks the last achievement of the soul.

So honored Chieftain, we resumed our march,
And reached thine own dominions:⁸⁰ at this place

Thou camest to salute me. Since that hour
Thou knowest all my story. Here I end.

And now De Soto's narrative was done.
The listeners rose, preparing to disperse.
Looking without, they saw translucent heavens,
The full moon over fields of glittering white,
And in the East the first faint rays of dawn.

Part IV

BOOK XXI

The Spaniards engage in disputes with the Chickasaws—De Soto becomes morose and melancholy—The first signs of Spring—Alonzo Romo, while hunting in the woods, encounters a great flock of parrots—He wounds one, and bringing it back, gives it to Lulla—A controversy arises between De Soto and the chief of the Chickasaws—Lulla informs Alonzo of a plot instigated by Creeping Bear as ring-leader, to surprise the Spanish host by a night attack—De Soto orders Moscoso to keep strict guard, but Moscoso neglects his duty, and the Spaniards are taken unawares by a night assault—Battle with the Chickasaws—The Spanish camp is burned—After great confusion among the Castilians, they are rallied by De Soto, assisted by Alonzo and Vasconcelos—Many Indians are slain, and the Spanish loss is heavy—Creeping Bear is slain by De Soto—The Indians are driven in flight—De Soto deposes Moscoso, and appoints Gallegos in his stead—Alonzo is wounded—Great sufferings among the Spaniards—Their devices for relief—A rude forge is erected, and the burned implements are shaped into new forms—Juan Vega, a peasant of the ranks, fashions cloaks and bedding out of the grasses of the fields—De Soto in his misfortunes, becomes more dejected, but is determined still—Flight of Lulla to the Spanish camp—She is kindly received by Alonzo, who promises to protect her—De Soto at first remonstrates, but is finally pacified.

THREE placid moons the Spaniards lay at rest
In the country of the Chickasaws, and there,
Amidst that land of plenty, by and by
Regained their wonted vigor. Neighboring woods
Supplied them with the opossum and raccoon,

With squirrels, with wild turkeys and with hares,
While every stream would weight the fisher's nets,
Or yield the fowler wild-fowl numberless.
But grown forgetful of their woeful past,
And all the deeds of kindness done them, soon
The Spaniards by their arrogance had lost
The red man's favor. In low bickerings,
In petty quarrels and unseemly brawls,
They threw away,—nay, put to vilest use,—
Days that demanded jealous husbanding.

Morose and melancholy, hour by hour,
De Soto brooded in his tent alone
Over the past, or over future days
More cheerless than the days already gone.
In youth, the mighty mountain-peaks of fame
Seem nigh at hand,—so nigh at hand that all
Who seek them may attain a lofty throne
Beside the Great Ones of the earth, who reign
There, in eternal snows, above the clouds.
Only a slender little vale of blue
Divides us from them: but on setting out
To reach them, how the pathway lengthens on,
And on, and on, forever! Noontide comes,
And finds us footsore in the little hills
Far from the snowy domes we sought to gain.
Eve comes, and finds us on a rocky path
In chilly, barren wilds, enwrapped in clouds,
Far, far astray, wandering, we know not whither,
Save that we know we draw not near the goal!
So, with De Soto: how those mountain heights
With their majestic peaks of deathless snows
Had now receded, leaving him alone
In vales of deep despondence far below!

He who maltreats himself must needs maltreat
Those who surround him. So De Soto now
Had grown so dark of thought and harsh of speech,
That closest friends addressed him ill at ease.
Though his long-suffering, loyal comrades felt
Their hearts moved with compassion for their chief,
Few ventured in his presence; those who went
Received gruff words, short answers, hard commands.

Now from the marsh and meadow, piping frogs,
Impatient of old Winter's long sojourn,
Petitioned Spring to haste her genial suns,
And warm the chillness of their watery haunts.
From naked boughs that huddled numb with cold,
The fluting blackbirds trained their silver throats.
In pure pellucid skies at evenfall
Resplendent Sirius glittered: keen and cold,
Shuddered the white-browed Rigel; over him,
Orion's girdle and his pendant sword,
Studded with brilliants, sparkled through the dusk:
Northward arose the jeweled Pleiades,
A-twinkle timidly amid the vast
Abysmal and ethereal depths of heaven.

On a march morning, with his fowling-piece,
Alonzo Romo strolled among the woods
Fringing a river near the Spanish camp.
The trees were bare; only a few as yet
Peeped forth their buds; their gnarled and naked
boughs,
With furry catkins shivering on their stems,
Hung gray and cheerless. Suddenly, the youth
Among the leafless forest trees beheld
A vast green flock of parrots.⁸¹ Not afar,

A clump of giant sycamores upreared,
With smooth and silvery limbs, like nude white arms.
From their twigs dangled myriad balls of brown,
Packed firm with seeds to tempt the ravenous beaks
Of that uncounted noisy multitude.
Legions of parrots thronged upon the boughs:
Some swinging on the balls in airy ease,
With their sharp horny bills dugged out the seeds,
Whose silken down went fluttering on the winds.
Others were perched among the neighboring trees,
Shuffling and smoothing back their glowing plumes;
Still others, in pairs, gravely affectionate,
Caressed each other, stroking cheek with cheek.
Beyond the trees, a waste of cockle-burs
Spread black and withered: straying from the rest,
Bevies of parrots climbed upon the weeds,
Pecking the kernels from their prickly shells.
The gaudy creatures, fluttering dark green plumes
Flecked brilliantly in yellow and in red,
With oriental splendor glorified
The dismal barrens, so that he who saw,
Might dream the gorgeous court of Solomon
Thronged with its courtiers in this western wild.

Alonzo fired; and then from every tree
Thousands of parrots screamed, and countless birds,
Seeing a comrade fall, flew round and round
In great green circles, loudly chattering,
Clamoring and squalling,—with unearthly din
Scolding and threatening the presumptuous youth
Who had thus dared their fury. But the lad,
Seizing his victim, found one wing was broken,
Though else the creature was unharmed: in rage,
Writhing and struggling frantically, it fought

Its captor with a vigor unimpaired.
Half-shamed a thing so beautiful to harm,
He took the parrot with him, and so left
Its brethren of the flock to go their way.

The lad, returning, paused in mute surprise
To see De Soto and the chieftain stand
Before the threshold of the governor's tent
In earnest disputation. Flushed of cheek,
With flashing eyes, the white man stood: the chief,
Despite the calmness of his eighty years,
In every aspect of his kingly face
Evinced unyielding firmness. Both the men
With emphasis conversed; both seemed resolved
No point to yield. The youth, embarrassed, sought
To saunter by unseen, but ere he passed,
De Soto spied the truant: calling him,
He cried in irritation, "Is there naught
Left for thine idle feet these precious hours,
But strolling through the woods? What bringest
thou?

A wounded parrot? Have we not our share
Of pests already, that thou slippest by
To smuggle in thy screaming popinjay?"
The big, strong youth, abashed, hung down his head,
Blushed like a girl, and answered never a word.

With eyes aflame, De Soto turned again
To Micalusa, adding, "Now behold!
Thou seest what small reliance I can place
Upon my own men,—idlers, idlers all!
And seeing how they fail me in my need,
Again I say to thee that thou must lend
An hundred of thy people to our host,

To bear our burdens to thy kingdom's end." He spake in tones imperious, and the youth Paused fascinated as he saw the two Strong men before him, like two men of steel. He wished to leave; yet having not the power To take one step, but standing open-eyed And open-mouthed, as is the way of youth, He seemed fast-fettered in some magic spell.

And now the Chieftain to De Soto turned
As eagle faces eagle, eye to eye;
The white lord gazed upon him searchingly,
But never did the old man wince: and then,
The haughty Spaniard, for the first time, met
With one whose glance quailed not beneath his own,
Stood half-abashed himself. The hoary chief
Next in slow accents answered, "Thou hast spoken:
But what if I *refuse* to give the men?"
De Soto started; never a man before
Had thus addressed him. So he knit his brows,
And reared himself to his full martial height,
In tones ungentle poised to make reply;
But soon he checked himself, weighing his words:
"Seek not bravado from me, reverend sire;
Vainglorious threats are never mine: but this
I say to thee,—all other chiefs before
Have heeded me, or they and those they ruled
Have suffered for their folly. Shun their fate."
"Sir, if thou threatenest," then rejoined the Chief,
"Be sure the men demanded shall not go;
But grant me time to counsel with my braves,
And service may be yielded. And know this:
In all the councils of the Chickasaws
I am thine only friend; my people rage

Against thee and thy followers; all our braves
Would fight thee rather than allow one boy
To bear thy burdens. I will plead thy cause
Before my warriors, for the sake of peace,—
Yea, but for the sake of peace alone. Again,
Know thou this also: if we give these men,
When thou hast reached our kingdom's end, each
brave

Must stand released: his service there must end:
No Chickasaw shall ever be a slave."

Retorted then De Soto: "I shall not
Ask aught but lawful service: all thy tribe
Must heed me for the sake of him I serve:
These men I call for in the name of him,
My master, the great Emperor overseas."
"And does that master," Micalusa cried,
"Give unto thee, and those that follow thee,
Orders to slay us, or to make us slaves,
Should we not hearken to unjust demands?
If that be true, no son of God is he,
But spawn of Lucifer, your prince of hell!"
"But we are Christians," answered then the other;
"Our mission is to set the heathen right;
If some are stiff-necked, from their punishment
Comes the salvation of the rest, who stand
In readiness the gospel to embrace."
"*But thou art not a Christian!*" cried the chief,
His dauntless eyes ablaze: "When hast thou turned
The left cheek, when the right cheek hath been
smitten?
Givest thou thy cloak to one who takes thy coat?
Goest thou two miles with him who drives thee one?
Dost lend thy purse, whoever begs? My lord,

Thou sayest, 'Resist not evil,' yet I see
Thou bearest evil, bidding *me* submit!"

De Soto answered, "Yea, thy words are just.
I am unworthy,—am not fit to bear
The name of Christian. In this pagan land,
Where men are starving for the bread of life,
A poor ensample have I proved myself
In feeding souls an hungered. Granting this,
Yet if I show myself remiss in duty
To the laws of God, are those laws proved unjust?
The Gospel stands forth perfect; judge it not
By deeds of men; let its own gracious truths
Be warrant for its entry into the heart.
The very excellence of that Gospel's law,
Which makes it harder to obey, is proof
Of that law's inspiration. For it sets
The highest of high standards, whereby all,
In seeking goodness unattainable,
May yet attain heights otherwise untrod."

"Our own Great Spirit," answered him the chief,
"Is a Father to us, and you yourselves
Have only called Him by another name.
Men are his children, and they lisp His name
In varied accents, as is childhood's way:
What matter if the name be this or that,
If the invocation be in reverence?
The name ye give Him may perchance be shown
More fitting than the one our simple hearts
In simple speech bestow upon Him: yet,
What earthly sire would smite his little babe
Who in his babble calls that father's name,
Not clearly, with a long-trained skillful tongue,

But in crude accents born of infancy?
Thy king hath many titles: would he spurn
A subject who invoked him by one title,
Rather than by another? God is King
Of all, with many titles, many names:
He is the God of gods, however known.
Let us adore Him by what name we choose,
Since one God only hears the whole world's prayers."

Ere answer could be given, Lulla came
To walk with her father home. The maiden smiled
Slyly upon the lad: Alonzo then,
With sudden boldness, foreign to his wont,
Came to her, put the parrot in her hands,
And said, "I wounded him in yonder wood;
Wouldst thou accept him? Take him." Presently,
Shamefaced to hear his own short speech, he blushed
Before the girl, and the two men, as though
Their eyes were burning through him: but the lass,
More daring than the youth, (as damsels are
When face to face with lads of their own years),
Said laughing, "I will keep him for the sake
Of him who gave him. I will take him home,
And tame him." Then she took the angry bird,
Avoiding skillfully his snapping beak,
And bore him lightly on her breast away.

Another week had passed, and not one word
Had reached De Soto from the natives: still,
Vague rumors wandered, whispering that the chief
Alone amongst his warriors raised a voice
In favor of the Spanish lord's demands;
That others, younger and more warlike, turned

Upon their king with scowls, or grimly smiled,
Sneering, "Old age hath tamed our eagle's heart!"

One afternoon, while walking through the fields,
Alonzo met with Lulla face to face,
As if by chance,—yet not by chance alone,
For she had wandered from her wonted path,
Designedly, it seemed: within her eyes
Excitement and anxiety he read.
But lightly casting off her serious air,
And smiling archly, she exclaimed, "The bird
Thou gavest me is tamed;⁸² he knows me well.
Thy name I gave him; and so when I call
'Alonzo' he will lift his broken wing,
And cawing, climb my chair with claws and beak,
Fearlessly eating the seed from out my hands."

The youth and maiden laughed; both their young
 hearts
Beat fast with sweet wild happiness. Above,
Riding a wind-swept bough, a blue jay clung,
As if to eavesdrop. Yet though left alone
By all intruders save that silly bird,
Between the two a strange embarrassment
Hung heavy. From a tuft of withered sedge,
With nervous, trembling fingers Lulla tore
The plummy crest. Alonzo, though his heart
Panted for speech, found all its utterance gone.

Then Lulla, changing her topic suddenly,
(As is the custom of her sex, to save
Matters of gravest import for the last):
"I know not surely, but a plot, I fear,
Against thee and thy host impends: to-night

Thy stronghold may be stormed: be thou alert.
My father is thy friend, but all the braves
Disdain his peaceful counsel. Grouped apart,
They speak in whispers, and I see them point
The finger, nod the head, or fix their gaze
Toward your ramparts on the distant height,
As though they planned a fierce attack. Amongst
These warriors, Creeping Bear, the craftiest,
And boldest, likewise, of our tribe, takes lead.
Their secrets from my father all are hid:
All my friends shun me; when they see me come,
Quickly they curb their tongues, or else they turn
Their chatter unto other, idle things,
Far from their own thoughts as they are from mine.
This very morning, the old woman who sleeps
Beside me at our wigwam, overheard
The gathered warriors as they laid their plans.
'Be ye prepared this night,' said Creeping Bear,
'To fall upon them; we must storm their walls,
Burn down their tents, and slaughter every man!'
She ran to tell me: so I haste to thee.
Beware, Alonzo! much I fear for thee."

Alonzo, thunderstruck, looked at the girl
In silence. Then, aroused, doubling his fists,
"Let them come on!" he cried, "even though they
come
In treachery, at the blackest midnight hour!
The rogues will find us ready. As for thee,
How may I thank thee as I should, sweet maid?
The tidings thou hast brought me soon shall reach
De Soto's ear. Perchance our lives we owe
To thee, and so among those lives, the one
Thou savest me shall ever be thine own."

Trembling with mingled fear and joy and pain,
The simple girl rejoined, "Thou knowest I love
My father and my people; that I grieve
To make old friends my foes by taking sides
With strangers. But ere this thou shouldst have
known"

(Here Lulla lowered her eyes), "that I would grieve
To see thee, or the ones thou lovest, fall."
She waited not his answer, but in haste
Turned her steps homeward, leaving him alone.

Alonzo sought the Governor, and gave
The message brought by Lulla. Quick of eye,
Sharply De Soto glanced upon the lad,
Saying, "Methinks this Indian girl grows bold
To pry about our camp; I like her not;
See to it, boy, that thou avoidest her.
A heathen jade is not for Christian youth."
The lad, crestfallen, might have answered him,
Had not De Soto frowned impatiently,
Saying, "Come with me to Moscoso's tent."
They found Moscoso stretched upon a couch,
His ease enjoying. As he rose to greet them,
De Soto cried abruptly, "Keep strict guard
Upon the camp to-night. The chieftain's girl
Hath told Alonzo that the heathen plan
To fall upon us in the darkness. See
That every sentry stands on duty: warn
The others not to doff their garbs for sleep,
But to lie dressed for fight, beside their arms."
Moscoso heard incredulous: he stroked
His yellow beard, and calmly smiled, retorting,
"But little faith I put in such wild tales;
Yet I will keep our men in readiness."

Now suddenly Anasco peered within,
And seeing those three, he joined them. "I have
heard

A little of your converse," he began:

"Be sure, Moscoso, that this rumor stands
On some foundation. As I strolled along
This morning through the Indian town, I saw
A woman who on yesternight became
The mother of a sturdy savage boy.
Strapped to her back, the child hung fast asleep:
The mother, unconcerned as though its birth
Took place a year ago, was sharpening spears,
And feathering shafts for arrows.⁸³ Who can doubt
That this, her toil at such an hour, portends
Some crisis, some emergency, that we
Shall soon be called to face?" De Soto turned
Unto Moscoso, saying, "Be alert:
For something whispers, 'This is Indian night':⁸⁴
Beware of treachery!" So I seek my couch
With horse in saddle, I myself in arms."

But though Moscoso promised thus to keep
Strict watch that night, he slumbered in his tent,
Set but a few on guard, and took scant pains
The rest to warn. So when the midnight came,
And all slept soundly, wrapped about with gloom,
The Indians stormed the camp. Blowing their horns,
Beating their drums, and shouting frenziedly,
The peaceful earth, lapt in reposeful shades,
They frightened to a pandemonium.
Four bands of warriors, at four different points,
All at the same time, rushed upon the fort,
And climbed the walls; the sentries first they slew,
And then upon the camp they leaped. Aloft

They bore great torches, touching every tent,
And every thatch-roofed hovel of the slaves
With the keen-pointed flames: their arrows flew
With burning tapers clinging to the barbs,
Setting the stables and the pens on fire.
Ere long the whole camp was ablaze; vast flames
Floated on high, with sparks that whirled and swirled
Like fiery swarms of bees: black turned the skies:
The stars dimmed; then, like children left alone
In a dark chamber, trembling with affright,
Who draw their deep bed-coverings overhead,
They hid their faces, and were lost to sight.

Roused and alarmed by the unearthly din,
The Spaniards leaped half-clad from bed, and sought,
Half-crazed, through densest darkness for their arms;
Stumbling, they fell against the stools, the chests,
Saddles or weapons, scattered on the floors:
All things stood in their way: then shivering,
Without their tabards or their cloaks to shield
Their bodies from the piercing cold, they rushed,
Bareheaded and barefooted, on the foe.
The captains shouted: the barbarians yelled:
The horses, penned in stables, girt with fire,
In terror neighed; as they appealed for life,
How their keen whinnies cleaved the shuddering
gloom!

As on Pompeii fell the fire from heaven,
And frantic thousands, rushing here and there,
Cried out in horror, while the crackling flames
Leaped high and higher, and the mountain roared,
And earth and heaven were whelmed in one vast doom,
So on the Christians at that midnight hour
Swept Fire and Slaughter, unrestrained in fury.

Then throngs of Spaniards, smitten with sudden terror,
Took flight; De Soto called and rallied them,
Crying, "For shame, ye sons of Spain! Return,
Follow me onward, and strike down the foe!"
Vasconcelos, the noble Portuguese,
His leader seconded; Alonzo came,
And so those three the enemy assailed:
Soon they were joined by others, and they hurled,
A shouting mass of valor, on the ranks
Of forest knighthood. Many Christians died,
But many more among the red men perished.
Like meteors blazed the muskets through the night.
Hoarse was the roar of gunnery: as in times
Of slaughter of the cattle, when a herd
Returns at evening to their fold, they see
Their comrades' bleeding pelts exposed, and smell
The life-blood steaming on the sodden ground,
So the survivors, maddened, and hoarse with rage,
Raise lamentations, till the listener quakes
At the wild bellowing of those deep-mouthed bulls,—
So now was heard that awful sound of arms
Throughout the darkness, with appalling tones
Chilling the heart. Anon and ever cracked
Fretful retorts of pistols, angrily
Struggling for hearing through the deeper boom
Of heavier weapons. Roused to sympathy,
The hard, quick echoes of the wilderness
Through glooms of ghostly hollows slapped and smote,
As though the demons of those haunted wilds
Were clapping giant hands.

Before the rest
In all that Paynim host, strode Creeping Bear,
Urging his comrades on, as he himself

Did countless deeds of prowess. As there comes
The great behemoth crashing through the reeds,
Mailed in a tough hide that repels the spears
And darts of hunters,—with the bloody foam
Flecked on his horrid jaws, and his wild eyes
Reddened with anger,—with his monstrous hoofs
Crushing his foes, and his blood-clotted horn
Hoisting on high or tossing through the air
His mangled victims—so in savage wrath
Stalked the dread Creeping Bear, his eyes aflame,
His white teeth gnashing, nostrils widely-blown,
And all his burly frame and stalwart limbs
Smeared in the blood of Christians swept to doom.

Now the dark night was pierced by rays of dawn,
Chilly and gray. Slowly approached each other
The two great leaders, giant Creeping Bear,
And the brave knight, De Soto: each was girt
With shouting followers, and each hewed his way
Through ranks of struggling foes: drawing still nigher,
The champions marked each other in the press,
And each the other sought with ardent zeal,
Burning to smite his foe and end the fray.
Now they stood face to face, the Iberian chief
Rearing above his war-horse like a god
In thunders and in lightnings panoplied,
While the tall savage like a Titan loomed,
Brown, bloody and appalling. Leaning back,
Then quickly bending forward, the white lord
Sought to fling forth his lance with all his might,
But bearing on one stirrup heavily,
The girth that held his saddle broke; he fell
With lance and saddle into the very arms
Of Creeping Bear, his dread antagonist.

The savage from the impact reeled and swayed,
Tottered, and toppled headlong to the ground.
Then clinched the pagan with the Christian brave.
Puissant was the forest champion,
With thighs like porphyry columns, and with arms
That crushed and choked and strangled like the coils
The anaconda tightens round his prey.
Then wrestled they together, locked as one
In the ferocious, deadly clasp of foes,
Which closer, more intense than love's embrace,
Ends never till its passion's focal flame
Is quenched beneath the dark and chilly flood
That gushes from the urn in hands of Death!
They tugged, they scuffled, rolling in the dust:
The giant red man, first triumphant, crushed
His struggling adversary under knee,
And then despite the blows that dashed his face
With spurting blood, seized on the Spaniard's throat,
Clutching with fingers firm as links of steel.
De Soto, stifled and smothered, weakened fast;
Scarce had he strength enow to move his hand
And draw a dagger; but at length he grasped
Convulsively the hilt; with a mad thrust,—
The last wild effort of fast-waning force,—
He plunged it in his panting enemy's heart.
One fearful shudder in that savage breast,
One gurgling murmur! Slowly then relaxed
That frightful clasp; the blood-shot eyes grew dim:
De Soto, gasping, knew his life was saved!

A while he lay half-swooning; by and by,
Recovering strength, with horsemanship superb
He vaulted back in saddle, touching not
The stirrup; so without a saddle-girth,

He still fought, riding easily. And now,
In glorious emulation of their chief,
His aids, Alonzo and Vasconcelos,
With miracles of valor rode the field.
At last the red men wavered; then they fled,
Leaving the sons of Spain victorious.

After the foe was crushed, De Soto met
Moscoso in the rear. With wrath he blazed,
Exclaiming, "Sluggard! for these precious lives
Art thou accountable! Well didst thou serve
The pagan in his onslaught yesternight!"
Moscoso, losing wonted lethargy,
Flushed crimson, and essayed some weak reply.
"Answer me not!" De Soto cried, "or else
Here on the field I call thee to account
In single combat. But enough of thee;
Thou art deposed; Gallegos takes thy place;
Know him henceforth as thy superior."

Thereafter, came Alonzo, riding slow,
His lips compressed, and his cheeks pale. One foot,
Pierced by an Indian lance when first he sped
Against the Paynim ranks, had tortured him,
And stained his horse's side with blood; but still,
Through the whole fight the boy had murmured not.
"What ho!" De Soto cried, "art wounded, lad?
By heaven, I love thee for thy lion-heart!
Never had I suspected until now
That even one little scratch was paining thee."

What a wild wreck the Spanish camp was left
After that fearful onslaught in the night!
The Christians looked about them stupefied,

Scarce realizing half their loss. For now
Black ruins blotted out with smoking towers
The blue of heaven; dismantled huts arose,
Gaunt, drear and hideous in the morning light.
Blasted and charred, uploomed those fearful relics,
Like frightened ghosts of midnight shades, that stand
Surprised by sudden dawn,—that cannot flee,
But face the sun aghast, immovable,—
With raiment blighted from the charnel dews,
With eyeless sockets, haggard, bony limbs,
And all the sombre horrors of the grave.

Begin by torturing flames, brave steeds had died;
Half of the helpless, maddened herd of swine
Had perished miserably. The workmen's tools,—
Axes and saws and hatchets,—all were now
Blackened, and dulled by the relentless flames.
Ropes, bridles, saddles, weapons, had been burned.
Footgear and raiment turned to ashen heaps,
Men roved half naked in the winds of March.
Great was the dole and teen: Maubila once
Had dragged the Christian host to poverty,
But Chickasaw had beggared every man.
Still, since their foes had taken flight, and ceased
To plague their steps, they now might welcome
peace,
Tend their sore needs and ease their sufferings.
A bellows from the skins of bears they made;
A musket-barrel formed the pipe; and so
A woodland smithy gave them timely aid.
The old burned arms and armor, and the tools
Of steel and brass, they cast upon the fires.
The huge hoarse bellows breathed upon the coals
That reddened first, then whitened in the heat,

Hissing with keen blue tongues, while through the
smoke

Myriads of twinkling sparks whirled merrily.
The candent metals glowed; and like a blade
That bites its way through adamant, the blaze
Gnawed at their glowing hearts. Ere long, beneath
The fierce, remorseless beating of the flames,
The stiff bars quivered and melted, or they fused
Each with the other. Now to fashion them
Under the hammer into other forms,
The soldier-blacksmiths, grimy from the soot,
Smote lustily, while rivulets of sweat
Through the swart powder trickled down their cheeks.
Over the anvils the soft pliant bars
With brawny arms and muscular they beat,
Shaping them all to goodly implements.
In hissing water next they tempered them,
And in great hairy hands they brought them forth
Triumphant to their comrades, who rejoiced
To grasp the faithful allies needed sore,—
New axes, wedges, lances, swords and shields.

But the half-naked men dejectedly
Shivered and shrank in icy gales; they lit
Great fires to yield them warmth; still, as one side
The heat would scorch, keen winds would lash the
other.

A few men in this world for all the rest
Must do the thinking. So in their distress,
Unto one soul there came a happy thought:
Juan Vega, a poor peasant of the ranks,
Observing long, thick grasses in the fields,
Said, "In this waste of withered grasses, I,
Poor as I am and lowly, yet may reap

A goodly harvest, that shall prove a boon
Better than gold or silver." With a sword
He cut the grasses, and with cunning hands
Contrived to weave them into mats and beds,
Blankets and pillows for the night's repose
Of weary comrades: skillfully he made
Warm cloaks from bearded grass to ward the
winds
Of bitter skies of March. Blest was that aid,
Till the warm sun, returning like a friend
After long absence, with his genial rays
Routed the chill blasts that had plagued their souls.

De Soto, bowed in deepest misery,
Seemed vanquished; yet his spirit leonine
Still breathed defiance at the scowls of Fate.
Restlessly his heart raged. Oftentimes he roamed
Beside a far-off stream in gloomy woods,
Companionless, unguarded and unarmed,
Contemptuous of the prowling savages.
Here, while around him from the leaden skies
Came melancholy sobs of April rains,
Again toward the heavens his hands he raised,
And swore to win the victory or to die.
And as some rustic lad with youth's wild dreams
Of wealth and fame, forsakes the prosy farm
To seek his fortune in a distant town;—
Who finds himself neglected and despised,
Who gnaws the husks flung from a stranger's hands,
And wins his threadbare garb through beggary:—
Yet barefoot, cold and hungry, in his pride
Scorns to return with head bowed down, and face
The sneers and simperings of the clowns at home,—
Thus roved De Soto, baffled, beggared, lost,

But yet too proud to own defeat, and turn
His feet reluctant on their pathway home.

Shortly ere sunset on a gloomy day
A sennight after the battle, Lulla came
Hasting, with wild eyes and disheveled hair,
Seeking for shelter in the Spanish camp.
She sought Alonzo's tent, fell at his couch,
And sobbed, "My lord, my master, unto thee
I fly for refuge. For my people know
That I revealed their plot; they seek my life,
And who will guard thy handmaid, lord, but thou?"

"Peace, Lulla," spake Alonzo tenderly;
"Nothing shall harm thee. O, sweet faithful soul,
Believe me, thou shalt find our gratitude
Not lacking in thy sorrow and thy need."
She wept a while; effacing then her tears,
She took his wounded foot upon her breast,
And dressed it lovingly. At last he said,
"Lulla, I owe thee much. But for thy aid
I should have perished,—yea, and all our host
Had fattened wolves and vultures. Tell me, lass,
With what requital shall I pay that debt?"
Again she burst in tears; she kissed his feet,
Sobbing aloud, "O, let me be thy slave!
My lord, my master, take me with thee, pray,
And I will follow thee through all the world."

De Soto came that moment; with a frown
He glanced upon the maiden at the couch.
"What means this?" cried he, angrily: "This girl
Should be with her own people; let her go."
But now Alonzo answered haughtily,

Facing his kinsman with fast-flashing eyes,
"She saved our lives. Because she proved our friend,
Her people seek to slay her. I have said
That I would give her shelter,—and I will."
De Soto, grown remorseful, lowered his eyes,
Saying, "I crave thy pardon. I was wrong."
And then he murmured, "Let the damsel stay."

BOOK XXII

Spring in the land of the Chickasaws—Micalusa comes to take his daughter home—Controversy between De Soto and Alonzo—Lulla's song—Song of the Indian maiden in reply—The Chief takes his daughter home—Alonzo is defiant of his kinsman and leader—Gallegos remonstrates with De Soto, but is at first unsuccessful—De Soto at last relents—Micalusa then refuses his daughter to Alonzo, but in time is likewise induced to consent to the marriage—Baptism of Lulla—The marriage of Lulla and Alonzo—The lamentations of the Chief—His blessings upon the pair—The parting between the father and daughter.

THROUGH gaunt and bare boughs of the wilderness
Resounded clarion-calls of jocund Spring;
Bleak, brown and haggard stood the wintry woods,
Expectant of the summons long delayed.
Earth, like the ruler's daughter, cold in death,
Who heard her Master's call, and leaped on foot
In all the glow and gladness of her youth,—
Earth heard her Maker say, "She is not dead,
But sleepeth; damsel, rise!" and woke in joy,
While all the choirs of Nature seemed to chant
From purling waters, newly-burgeoned leaves,
From quickening winds and reawakened birds,
"I am the Resurrection and the Life!"

Now from the woody hollow's blackened mould
The blue-eyed violets peeped, wooed by the songs
Of sweet bluebirds, their cousins of the air.

The wild-plum twigs, with wee white myriad flowers
Seemed hanging scented snowdrifts, and aloft,
Wild cherries, frosted with their pearly blooms,
Made odorous palaces, whence gurgled songs
Trilled by the brilliant redbird to his mate.
The gadding cross-vines swung their orange wreaths
In coverts where the slim brown thrashers perched,
And warbled forth mellifluous melodies.
The red bud seemed a lilac-tinted cloud,
Down-floated to the earth from fields of dawn;
Next came the dogwood's constellated stars
Of radiant white, and then the locust branch
Drooped fragrant creamy clusters numberless,
A wild haunt, where the peerless mocking-bird—
Blithe, airy, thrilled with youth and love and joy—
Tripped, soared, descended, piping, twittering,—
Unequaled master of the lyric art
In grace, in compass and dexterity.

Lulla not long had lingered at the camp
Of her protectors, ere her father came
Seeking her. At that selfsame time, the girl
Unto the neighboring woods had wandered forth,
To gather simples by her folk esteemed
In healing wounds and burns; these now she sought
For Christians who had suffered in the battle.
Alonzo (since his hurt was well-nigh healed),
Had gone to aid his comrades at their task
Of building rafts beside a neighboring stream
Soon to be crossed upon the westward march.
In deep anxiety the old man came,
Saying, "My daughter,—is she here? They say
That she hath fled to you for shelter." "Yes,"
Returned De Soto, "hither came thy child

For refuge when thy people sought her life.
At noon she strolled away to gather herbs
To cure our sick men; but at evenfall
Here she will be again." So then, the Chief,
Relieved in part, exclaimed, "The timid girl
Took fright, and fled the town while I myself
Had gone upon a journey; left alone,
Dark might have been her fate; but coming back,
I crushed the rebels to submission; none
Will now dare lift a hand against the child.
I go: ere set of sun I will return
To take the damsel to our lodge again.
Say to her that her parrot calls her name
Unrestingly, as though he longed to tell
How he has missed her through the lonesome hours,
While the old woman by our wigwam fire
Weeps, fearing that she never will return."

He left; but scarcely had he passed from sight,
When young Alonzo, from his task performed,
Strolled into camp. Upon his kinsman's brow
A bodeful shadow lay. After a pause,
"Son," said the Governor, speaking tenderly,
"I would not cast upon thy boyish heart
A weight as heavy as a mothy wing.
But Lulla must not linger here. The Chief
Left shortly ere thou camest, and ere long
He will return to claim her. Thou canst not
Make her a slave, nor lightly treat the girl
As one of vulgar birth, for she descends
From sires illustrious, savage though she be.
Well did the father and the maid herself
Prove themselves friends when most we needed friends;
So thou, I know, wilt never do her wrong."

The lad flushed, and exclaimed, "Surely my lord
Hath never fancied I could fall so low
That I would lightly wrong a simple girl
To whom we owe our lives?" "Nay, nay, my
son,"

De Soto answered, "but the gossips tattle,
And she must go." "I know not if she must!"
Alonzo answered, lifting dauntless eyes
Upon his kinsman; "Thou wouldst give commands
Ere counseling with me. Why judge her thus,
And then acquaint me with thy fixed decree,
As airily and easily as though
I were thy serf, bound only to obey?"
The boy, courageous to his finger-tips,
And well aroused, no longer hung his head
In deference to his elder: so he stood
Determined, and awaited a reply.

De Soto frowned, and curled his lips in scorn,
Retorting, "Wilt thou deign to tell me why
I should consult thee? Hast an interest
In her concerns? By what superior claim
Wilt thou attempt an interfering hand?"
Exclaimed Alonzo, "Thou art not her judge,
Nor art thou mine! If I have shown concern
For her or hers, thou needest not to know
My reason, nor demand that I should tell!"
"Thou fanciest that thou lovest her," rejoined
The elder. "Folly! Youthful hearts like yours,
Like wisps of straw, are quickly set ablaze,
Quickly to burn out. Wait until your heart,
Solid and massive, like a heart of oak,
Takes the fire slowly; then, when once uplit,
It may give forth a sure and steady flame."

Seeing tears gathering in the lad's bright eyes,
De Soto, with an effort, calmed himself;
"I will ignore this insolence," he said;
"But know this: ere night comes, the girl must leave."
"That we shall see!" cried the boy angrily.
Not waiting for the Governor's response,
Turning away, without the tent he strode,
And hurried forth, his comrades to rejoïn.

Out in the woods, while culling roots and herbs,
The Indian maiden, Lulla, sang a song;⁸⁵
Sweeter her accents than, in morning groves,
The luting and the fluting of the birds,
Or, heard in Hellas, notes of love-lorn nymphs,
Smitten with beauty of some Thessalian boy!

"As the young pine waving on yonder hill,
Graceful and tall, is the lad of my heart;
He is swifter of foot than the stately deer
Outflying the hunter and the hunter's dart.

"The locks on his brow are glossy and dark
As the wing stretched forth when the blackbird flies;
His eye, like an eagle's in upward glance,
Seems to mirror keen stars of the winter skies.

"His arm is as strong in the raging fight
As the ironwood bow he easily bends;
His aim is as sure as the aim of the hawk,
And his shaft through the breast of his victim sends.

"His heart is heroic, and great and strong,
Yet tender and true,—like the heart of the bear
Who faces his foes and defends his cubs
While they sleep in the depths of his rocky lair.

"O, aid me, ye spirits of waters and winds,
And aid me, ye spirits of earth and of sky,
To waft forth his praise over land and lake,
Till his fame, like my love, lives never to die."

On drawing nearer to the river's marge,
Far-off, some Christians in a boat she spied,
Alonzo with them; for the youth had now
Rejoined his comrades. She had heard him say
Their army soon would cross the stream; and so
She feared these newly-fitted barks ere long
Would bear his people from her land forever.

Some roguish maidens of the Chickasaws
Were loitering by the river as the lad
With downcast air passed by, and seeing him
Distracted and distressed, fathomed his heart
With the sure scrutiny of woman's eyes.
They hearkened unto Lulla as she sang
From hills above, deeming herself unheard;
But they had guessed her secret long before:
For Lulla, seeking in a maiden's way
To hide her love, had only made it known;
Yea, as some anxious bird seeks to allure
The meddling stranger from her nest near by
With chirps and cries, and plumage fluttering,
And yet betrays it by her eagerness,—
So Lulla in her struggles to divert
The eyes of others from her secret love,
Only more surely had that love revealed.
One forest damsel, like her own self, young,
And envious of her hold upon his heart,
Gladdened to see Alonzo in the boat,
Fancying the pale-faced boy had proved untrue.
So then to Lulla tauntingly she sang:

"Why is your handsome white youth sad?
He crosses the river with tears in his eyes.
O damsel, cease sighing in fruitless regret,
For he will forget, O, he will forget!

"Indian lass, you will lose your lad,—
He is going away, he is going away!
How foolish to love, and to hope for, him yet,
For he will forget, O, he will forget!

"Sighing, he gazes fondly back,—
Your sweetheart will waver when once out of sight!
And soon it shall seem that you never have met,
For he will forget, O, he will forget!

"True is he now, but soon is false;
For man is a bird that is swift on the wing;
Once flitted, he never returns to your net,
For he will forget, O, he will forget!"

Poor Lulla at that heartless raillery
Trembled and burned with shame. Silent she stood
There in the lonely woods, sad as a bird
Whose nest hath been despoiled. But as the eve
Declined, and shadows lengthened on her path,
Back to the camp she turned, upon her arm
Bearing the simples. Suddenly she heard
Footsteps behind her: "Whither hurriest thou?
Homeward? Then, Lulla, I will go with thee."
It was Alonzo's voice: gladdened, the two
Sped onward laughing. As they tripped along,
Her soft warm tiny hand he held in his,
Pressing it closely in his own big palm.
Above them, in a maze of willow boughs
Plumy with fragrant yellow catkins, perched

A little wren: with a wee swelling breast,
And a wee throat aburst with lyric power,
He warbled "Courage, courage!" to the pair,
Like a boy-bugler urging knightly hosts
To victory on some field in fairyland.

But all too soon they reached the camp, and there
They found the old Chief and De Soto joined
In earnest converse; seeing lass and lad,
The father uprose gladly, threw his arms
Around his child, and pressed her lovingly.
Lulla with sobs and laughter called his name,
Folding his neck in soft caressive arms.

Then Micalusa, with an altered voice,
Said to Alonzo: "I have spoken, Son,
Unto thy kinsman and my gracious lord,
Of thee and Lulla: he hath said to me
That he fears greatly in your youthful hearts
Hath risen some affection. He is just,
Saying that such a fancy, if ye twain
Have cherished it, must not be cherished more.
Since he hath spoken in such open terms,
Too proud am I to let a child of mine
Go to a house that does not welcome her;
Nor can I bear to see my daughter stray
Far from her home, her father and her friends,
To seek a stranger's land beyond the sea,
And there forget her people and their God.
Come with me, daughter; it is growing late,
And we have far to go."

Rousing at this,
Alonzo, pale and trembling, faced the Chief:
"I love her!" cried he; "I will wed the maid:

Why come between us?" But the gray-haired sire,
Frowning, and firm-set in his purposes,
Cried to the stripling, "Stand aside, young man!
This is my daughter. She must go with me!"
He took the damsel's hand; she wept aloud,
But walked beside him unresistingly;
So then the sire and daughter went their way.
Alonzo in his fury wheeled about,
Facing De Soto, and he madly cried,
"This deed is thine!" Gallegos, standing by,
Marked the youth's actions; seeing him so wroth,
And fearing some rash act, he seized his arm,
And forced him, raging still, to his own tent.

So the lad moped about from day to day
Disconsolate, repellent in his air,
A burden to himself and all his friends.
Gallegos, noting this, went, much concerned,
To see De Soto. Rugged though he was,
Awkward, uncouth, and fierce of countenance,
In his heart still was left some tenderness.
"By all the saints of heaven!" frankly he cried,
Standing before the Governor in his tent,
"I tell thee thou shouldst not oppose the lad:
I know that thou wilt pardon one so blunt,
Since, as thou knowest, I was reared to arms,
Rude and unpolished, unexpert in books;
But thou must likewise know my heart hath been
Through good or evil fortune, always thine.
Trust me, and grant the lad and lass their wish."
"And hast thou, too," De Soto cried, "joined force
With those who fight me? Thou, Gallegos, thou,
Above them all, shouldst loyal be, and true.
Thou knowest my ambition for the boy;

Thou knowest him to be of gentle birth:
How canst thou, then, beseech me to consent
Unto a union so amazing?"

"Sir,"

Gallegos answered, "take the word of one
Who knows the world: *Man's truest guide is Fate:*
Since it hath joined their hearts, who can declare
Its wise decree unwise? Not thou, nor I!
Sir, as we walk along, the sun himself
Seems to walk with us; when we stop, he stops,
And when we go again, his pace resumes.
And so at night, when strolling through a wood,
The moon strolls with us, pausing when we pause,
While all the stars hang fixed upon the boughs
Of every bush whereby we sit or stand.
Well! in this life our petty vanity
Deceives us like these fictions of our eyes,—
The sun, the moon, the stars,—all earth and heaven,—
Exist alone for our important selves!
Be not deceived, nor magnify thyself
Nor kindred to a superhuman worth
Above all those around thee." "I shall not,"
Rejoined the other warmly; "but why urge
This mating with a child of savagery?"
"As for her birth," Gallegos answered him,
"Forsooth! long hast thou known, and so have I,
Though savage be her people, demigods
Have never turned to dust more willingly
In fighting for their hunting-grounds and homes.
If that be not nobility, my lord,
Then tell me what nobility may be?
Upon my body, and upon thine own,
Od's fish! their spears have carved their coats of arms."

"But this would blight his future," cried the other;
"The lad is brave and loyal, bright of mind,
And fitted for the leadership of men:
If, in the folly of hot-blooded youth,
Some reckless marriage brings him not to grief,
Who can foretell what brilliant destiny
His noon of life may yield him?"

"By my troth,"

Gallegos answered with a rueful sigh,
"If destiny and leadership should mean
The living of a sorry life like mine,
Or even as thine own, may God defend
The lad from such career! Why, what are we
But tattered strollers, gipsies, vagabonds,
Land-pirates, suffering shipwreck on the land?"

De Soto's visage clouded; in his eyes
Displeasure sparkled; then retorted he:
"Thy verbiage is the verbiage that is fit
Only for weaklings and poltroons, and ever
Unworthy of the ranks of chivalry.
Such paltry counseling would end all dreams
Of conquest, empire and discovery.
With arguments like these, Cortez had never,
Scorning retreat, dared set his ships afire,
And Mexico had never bent the knee."

The other, seeing he had stepped amiss,
Discreetly held his tongue a while: and so,
After a pause, De Soto spake again:
"This lightsome youthful fancy soon will pass:
It is the passion of a callow boy
And the vague yearning of a silly girl,

Born of the Springtime, with the Spring to end.
It is but love's counterfeit; for true love
Is not for Spring alone; it must endure
The parching drought of Summer, the bleak winds
Of Autumn, and December sleets and snows."
But now Gallegos, with a soldier's eye,
In his opponent's armor spied the seam,
And thrust his weapon in it. "Thou didst not,"
He answered, "own such thoughts in other years.
I heard thee tell the Indian Chieftain once
The story of thy love for Isabel,
When thou wert but a lad, she but a child,
And how Pedrarias waved thee off in scorn,
And how from year to year he made thee wait.
Hernando! Let thy strong and generous soul
Turn in compassion on these youthful hearts,
That bleed, as thine own bled, for sixteen years!"

A spot most tender had he touched; and then
With tact unwonted in a mind so rude,
Not waiting for an answer, hastily
He rose to leave; next saying, "Think of this,"
He strode away.

Gallegos having left,
De Soto wandered out among the woods.
There, treading stilly aisles where druid oaks
Shed glooms profound from lofty coronals,
Communion with himself he held; and there,
Where ancient holes in hoary majesty
Like great cathedral columns reared aloft,
Making benignant cloistered solitudes,
His soul was lost in dreams; allured afar,

Through dim retreats of memory roamed his heart.
A spell seemed chanted in the deep, low sighs
Of pensive winds that stirred umbrageous boughs.
His turbulence was stilled. Tranquillity
Resumed dominion in his war-worn breast.

All flowers that bloom at night are white. And so
The blossoms of the spirit in its gloom
Are pure and stainless. From the funeral pyre
Where flame our perished hopes, there streams a glow
That lights the dark recesses of our souls.
Even thus De Soto, in the tenfold night
Of sorrow, found his pathway fringed with blooms
Snowily fair, while in the sombre skies
Ambition's death-fires made a silvery dawn.

His adamant bosom melted. Ah,
Pieces of eight and ingots had he lost,
To win a heritage of greater worth,—
The gift of kindness and humility!
The stubborn mastiff had released his grip
On old dry bones of dogmas, codes and creeds,
Once clutched so grimly in his iron hold.

The youthful misdemeanants in his court
Had gained a hearing. Now he realized
That others' happiness, and not his own,
Must be his care. The ardent sweets of love,—
The paradise found in the loved one's arms,—
Exultant pride of fatherhood, conjoined
With poignant bliss and pain of motherhood,
To make the mightiest drama of this world,—
Never would these be his, nor Isabel's,
Through all their life to come! Long years of teen
Had left the sweet springs of his life unsweet.

But all ungentle thoughts he now repelled;
Tears came that nigh enwomaned him. And here
A waif of old-time Spanish balladry,
A lyric loved in childhood, came to mind;
Ah, often with the rebec's piercing thrill
That song had charmed him in the long ago:

"Give me, O Fate, some one to love,
And one to love me in return;
To win this blessing, saints above
For old-time earthly haunts might yearn.

"O, for the touch of gentle hands,
The spell of accents sweet and low!
One cannot crush the heart's demands;
Nature will not be cheated so!

"Man's bosom ever seeks its mate;
No soul that lives can live alone;
Unloved, the king in kingliest state
But banquets on a crust and bone.

"The dream I dream may be in vain,
Mine idol be with earth alloyed;
But shield me from the deadening pain
Of seeing Faith and Trust destroyed!

"The disenchantments earned from Truth
Fall blotting Life's unsullied page;
Better sweet follies born of youth
Than bitter wisdom bought of age!

"Reft of its plumage, sinks the dove,
Reft of its dewdrops, faints the fern:
Give me, O Fate, some one to love,
And one to love me in return."

These joys were his no more. But there was yet
A power left in his hands to make this gift
To others. Round the crater of his heart
The blooms through ashes and through lava twined.
To wear the helmet, wield the sabre,—this
Could not be all of life; still might he win
A noble victory, not through hate, but love!

At noon that day, De Soto sent a page
To call his nephew. When Alonzo came
With his pale face and agitated air,
He eyed the youngster smilingly, and said,
“Son, I have wronged thee. Thou shalt have the lass.”
With that short speech he ended. Then a glow
Of joyance lit the lad’s wan cheek with red,
Like a red morning over fields of snow.

The youth embraced his kinsman; then he wrung
De Soto’s trembling hand. With a wry face,
Made half in earnest, half to hide his thoughts,
The Governor cried, “Heavens! what a grip thou hast!
Why, boy, thy hands are monstrous. Like a bear’s,
Thine arms and paws might hug one to his death.”

Unmindful of the dangers in his path,
The young man to the Indian village sped
On eager, anxious feet. Along his way,
From the green vines of bloomy scuppernongs
Amorous wood-thrushes sang him dulcet lays
Of sweet felicitation in his bliss.
Ah, short-lived rapture! For in little time
He was to wake, and find it all a dream.

Reaching the village, with a bounding heart
He faced the Chieftain, and the lass he loved.

He told the good news; but the old man frowned,
Saying, "Indeed, thy kinsman stoopeth low;
How are we honored! Tell him that I thank him;
But *I* refuse; my daughter shall not go."

The maiden stood in tears. "What!" cried the Chief,
"Wouldst thou forsake me in my lonely age?
Dost wish to leave us and thy land forever?
Wouldst turn from burial-places of thy sires,
To go, a stranger, to the stranger's land?
Despisest thou thine own, thy mother's house?
Wouldst choose the white man's God, forgetting ours?
Enough! I will not hear it. Go, young man!"

Alonzo left, dejected. As he passed
The haunts of bloomy scuppernongs, so late
The scene of rapture, thrilled with songs of love,
He found all silent, as if all the birds
Had shunned him in his grief, like the false friends
Of this ungrateful world, who welcome us
In fortune, but forsake us in our need.
But on the leafless bough of a dead tree,
A dove sat mourning all forlorn, as though
In sympathy with his own widowed heart.

When with slow, leaden feet at last he reached
His lonesome tent, he crouched in misery,
Feeling, as every lovelorn youth has felt
Since the first dawn, that life,—that all the world,—
Lay buried in the ashes of his dream.
But Lulla, never yielding to despair,
So wrought upon her father stealthily,
With all a maiden's tact and craft and skill,
That by and by he gave consent. And then

Like some poetic mocking-bird, her heart,
A-thrill with joy, leaped, fluttered, danced and sang,
Exuberant in its ecstasies of love.

So she was baptized. Though the bridal day
To the impatient pair seemed long-deferred,
Scarce had the snowy blossom of the plum
Downfallen from the green fruit, when that hour
Came round in sweetness and felicity.
How glorious was the dawning of that day!
Morn's vivid blush incarnadined the heavens:
Through interwoven cloudlets half revealed,
Her billowy bosom glowed with rival hues
Of damask roses and of creamy snows;
Shimmering through veils of opalescent fires,
Her gold hair threw a halo round her head.
She seemed a sorceress, with a shaft of light
Drawn sword-like from the scabbard of the dark,
Whose touch transmuted leaden clouds to gold.
Through gay savannahs and green-tufted groves
The brooks ran murmuring soft beatitudes;
In pastoral calm sweet buds were burgeoning;
Birds sang the resurrection of the world.

As the sweet, piercing joy of waking love,
Old as the oldest mountain of the world,
Seems new to lovers of to-day, and still
Will seem as new when we are dust in dust,—
So fresh, so new and so poetic shone
That morn of twinkling dew to the amorous eyes
Of Lulla and Alonzo: it appeared
Unto that happy twain as if old Earth,
Though hoary with her countless centuries,
Never had seen a morning flame before.

Rude in his manner, yet of kindly heart,
Gallegos hied him to the neighboring fields,
And gathered clusters of wild-roses; these,
Dew-gemmed and fragrant, pale and delicate,
Back to the camp he lightly bore; so there,
With big rough hands, yet nimble, nice and swift
From constant use in war's necessities,
A wreath he wove to circle round the brows
Of the sweet forest-maid: and all declared
That never an empress on her wedding-day
Wore sparkling diadem more gracefully
Than Lulla wore her simple wild-rose spray.

And now the time had come when she should part
Forever from her father and her home.
Like Jacob yielding Benjamin of old,
The patriarch, stoic Indian though he was,
Stood blind with tears, and lifting up his voice,
Cried, "Never, never shall I see thee more!
Alone within my wigwam I shall stand
Deserted—left in darkness—reft of children!
Thy brethren and thy sisters went before,
And then thy mother,—thou art last of all!
Beside my desolated, dreary hearth,
Lonesome, companionless and daughterless,
I now shall brood upon the bygone days,
Forsaken and forgotten by the world!"

His sobs called forth his daughter's. In that hour,
What slightest consolation could be given?
They would have toyed with sorrow, and but
mocked,
Had they essayed with weak and idle words,
To solace his despair.

After a pause,
Again he cried: "O daughter, thou mayest turn
To other gods than ours,—(though I shall not),—
Yet, daughter, I entreat thee to the last,—
Forget not thy good mother,—she who died
By hands of Choctaws when thou wert a babe,
But dying, saved thee from those murderous foes,
Hiding thee under the bearskin in our lodge!"

Then with an effort he repressed his tears,
Saying to Lulla: "Heed me not, my child.
Old men like me forget we once were young,
And we forget that daughters must be given
In marriage till the world itself shall end.
Fathers forget that daughters must be wives,
And being wives, must leave the old-time nest,
Forsaking those who reared them. So, my child,
Cleave to thy husband, and obey him ever,
For thou art going to thy spouse's home,
Not he to thine, and well he knows the ways
Of Christians; he must guide thine untrained feet,
Thou being but a simple forest-maid."

So the gray patriarch of the wilderness,
Like those of eld on far Assyrian plains,
Then gave his blessing with uplifted hands:
"O thou, my daughter's husband, unto thee
Be given Swiftness, Strength and iron Will!
May earth yield generous increase unto thee,
In gifts of corn and oil: may liberal showers
Bear teeming fruits to strew about thy feet,
And drive all drought and famine from thy fields:
May God award thee plenteous hunting-grounds,
Nor bring thee empty-handed from the chase.

If thou hast storms in life, (and such must come),
May they but leave thee like the giant oak,
More strong from combat with the winds of heaven!
O, mayest thou never see the hapless day
When thou must kneel for mercy to thy foes,
But may thy foes beg mercy at thy feet,
And mayest thou bear such wisdom in thy heart,
That thou shalt grant that mercy readily!"

Next turning unto Lulla, said the sage:
"May the Great Spirit thou didst worship once
Be Father still to thee when far away!
O, may He smile, and fruitful make thy womb,
So that the children playing at thy knees
Shall all be fair and sturdy, and the heart
Of him who calls thee wife shall yearn toward thee
Even more in years to come than on this day!
Though I shall never see them, mayest thou see
Thy children's children in expanding bloom!
O may God make of thee the perfect wife,
And grant thee peace and joy and length of years!
May all thy tears, (and tears must fall), but be
Like gentle dews upon the fields at morn,
Refreshing to thy heart when parched with grief."

So then they parted, weeping bitterly.
As the Castilian host its march began,
The soldiers for the last time backward turned:
The old man, on a hillside far away,
Stood all alone, and mute and motionless,
His hand above his eyes, was gazing still
Toward the white men in the distant west,
Who carried her, the last of all his race,
Forever from the land of Chickasaws.

BOOK XXIII

The march resumed—Great swamps and Canebrakes—Reaching the Nonconnah—Flight of the pigeons—Chisca and its two mounds—Seizure of the native women—A battle is imminent, but is averted by overtures of peace—De Soto visits the Chief at his mound—His interview with the Chief—Discovery of the Mississippi—De Soto's dream—The new Nation to come into being on the banks of the Mississippi—Its achievements in the arts and sciences—A wisp of vapor is made a great Power—Lightnings drawn from the heavens—Flowers of flame—Cables are laid beneath the sea—Converse is held with those far away—Scenes in one land are reproduced in others—Sounds are imprisoned—Flight through the air—Vessels beneath the waters—Riding above the clouds—Conquest of the pestilence—Darien becomes a highway for ships—Discovery of the North Pole—Religion of the Brotherhood of Humanity.

SEVEN long laborious days their steps they dragged
Through swamps and marshes, canebrakes and
 lagoons,—

Vast solitudes where no man lived. These passed,
Gladly they trod a province richly green,
And flowing with abundance. Year by year,
The red men of this country, at the close
Of Autumn, when the dead leaves quivering down,
Had strewn knee-deep the sod, would give to flames
The dry brown rustling waste of foliage;⁸⁶ thus
The matted undergrowth in fire would perish,
And only stateliest towering trees remained,
Around whose feet, in procreant airs of Spring,

Would grow tall grasses, many-podded beans,
And wild peas roving in luxuriance.
With dense bamboos the rivulets were fringed,
Making dim covers, haunts of bear and deer.

In time they reach Nonconnah's mossy banks,—
Nonconnah,—“Long Stream” of the Indians.⁸⁷
Nature's own gloomy hermitage was here,
Deeply embowered in verdant virgin woods.
Here wild-geese honked; here soared white cranes;
here swam
Brown-breasted mallards, glossed with blue and
green.
From limbs of flowering tulip-trees upraised
Cream-colored, honey-hearted chalices:
Catalpas hung their broad green heart-shaped leaves,
With clusters of their white and freckled blooms:
Like great cathedral spires, gigantic oaks
Pierced dizzy heights; their stalwart limbs were
hung
With rambling muscadines, whose serpent coils
Clomb skyward, and from topmost pinnacles
Flung out their green and glossy gonfalons.
Along the stream, tall scarlet cardinal flowers
Flamed brilliantly: beneath them softly shone
The azure ageratum's silken tuft:
Frail spider-lilies glimmered through the gloom:
Blackberries tangled wildly: over them
The yellow waxen dodder-nets entwined:
Like creamy odorous arras trailed the sprays
Of blooming grapevines, and amid those haunts
Of coolness and of fragrance and of shade,
With great leaves drooping emerald curtains down,
The timid hermit-thrush and wood-thrush sang.

As hither fared the Christians, from afar
Like distant cannonading, came a roar
That seemed to shake the whole wide forest; soon
Still louder and still louder swelled the sound,
As though great guns, (hoarse giants, iron-mouthed),
Trained on some empire's great metropolis
To force surrender or denounce its doom.
Ere long, a great cloud, hurrying from the North,
Swept over, blotting out the noonday sun.
The noise grew deafening; over earth was cast
A vast black shadow; looking up, they saw
Flocks of wild pigeons multitudinous,
Swarming like locusts in the Libyan skies.⁸⁸
No man could count them: in that weird eclipse,
The noonday dimmed to twilight; when one spoke,
His feeble voice was drowned amid the roar,
And loudest shouts seemed whispered far away.
Hour after hour they swept in legions by,
Deep thunder following thunder, shade on shade.
Battalions settled on the forest limbs;
Then louder grew the thunder, as the boughs
Swayed overloaded, groaned and snapped and cracked,
And then, crash following crash, came tumbling down.
Now, far and near were seen the falling limbs,
Crushing the pigeons as they smote the ground,
Or driving them, affrighted, through the air,
Swirling in wild gyrations round and round,
And flying in men's faces. Long it seemed
As though that endless ocean-waste of birds
In its vast billows would engulf the host
Of startled men beneath them. Terror-stricken,
The horses reared and snorted, leaped and neighed,
As whirling wild birds from fast-falling boughs
Would strike against them blindly. By and by,

Ere eventide, the multitude was lessened:
The sunrays glinted on the birds, and lit
With fire their wings of sober gray, or glowed
In rainbow splendor on their burnished necks
Of iridescent green and blue and gold.

Onward they marched a league; here they beheld
The nesting-place,⁸⁹ deserted by the host
Ere this encountered, though enthroned as yet
By brooding swarms innumerable: so thus
"Road of the Pigeon Roost" this way was called.⁹⁰
On the great boughs and tiny forks of twigs
Myriads of nests were huddled. Over all
The earth beneath were scattered broken limbs,
Fallen through over-burdening: far and wide,
From shattered nests were strewn the callow birds,
Some naked, some half-fledged, some well-nigh plumed,
With others scarce half-broken from the shell.
Over them hawks and buzzards flitted, gorged
Upon the writhing squabs, while battenning wolves,
Seeing the white men, slunk away from sight,
Their banquet leaving with reluctant feet.

They reached a village, (Chisca it was called),⁹¹
Set in fat fields of green, luxuriant corn.
Here the Iberians,—learning that the men
Had all departed from their homes that day,
Hunting through neighboring wilds,—in a mad mood
Seized on the women working in the fields,
And those in wigwams at their household toils.
This folly brought them all to grief, for soon
A throng of angry warriors came with shouts,
Planning a rescue. Loud the women shrieked,
And loud the warriors answered with their yells;

The captives sought to spring, and make escape
To their friends calling them, but held by force,
Uselessly they struggled. Yet all the while
The host of Paynim warriors grew, and came
Nearer and nearer, threatening instant war.

Beyond the village rose two lofty mounds,⁹²
Reared there in ancient, long-forgotten years,
By ancient, long-forgotten tribes of men.
High on the summit of one monticle
Uprose the wigwam of the Chief: to this
A ladder once had offered access free,
But this was now updrawn; no enemy
Might scale the hillock to the lodge above.
The Chief lay sick; but, angered, from his couch
He leaped when first he heard the cries below.
An old man, humping over with ancientness,—
A little puny, wizened, wheezing dwarf,
In form and feature like a bearded goat,—
He peered without his door: albeit, sans doubt,
The tiniest dandiprat encountered yet
Among the stalwart forest denizens,
Greater his rage seemed for his littleness.
He shook his white head, rolled his bloodshot eyes,
And piped in piercing, shrill grasshopper shrieks
So sharp they seemed his very throat to split:
Waving his little clenched fist angrily,
And screaming defiance at the Castilian host,
“Begone, ye greedy white-faced wolves!” he yelled;
“Seek not to rouse in wrath the lordly bear,
Or else his paw shall smite you, limb to limb,
And drive you, howling, to your woods again!”
The Spaniards jeered and fleered him; so in rage
The pigmy warrior seized a tomahawk,

And made toward his wigwam door, resolved
To pounce upon them. But his anxious wives,
A host of wailing females, crowding round,
Laid hold of him, and would not let him go.
"O leave us not!" they cried; "thou art but one,
Facing a multitude: and thou art old,
While yon young warriors, armed with health and
strength,
Might each, with one hand, master thee. Thou seest
The frightful neighing brutes thy foes bestride,
Like wild black steeds that on the midnight winds
Gallop, obeying whips of demons. Lo!
They wear the armor that we oft have heard
Shatters the flint, and strews it on the ground.
There thou beholdest those enchanted arms
Whose roar is like the thunder, and whose jaws
Murder with shafts of lightning. Harken, Lord,
Linger with us, nor tempt thy fate." "Begone!"
He squeaked retorting, "I will front them all.
Unhand me! Let me go." Yet hugged and held
By vine-like arms of weeping women fast,
He raged and stormed and struggled punily,
Balked in his thirst for vengeance.

But from scenes
That thus provoked their mirth, the white men turned
To those which gave them more concern. For now,
Upon the outskirts of surrounding fields,
With bows and arrows, clubs and tomahawks,
In legions gathered sturdy foresters.
Maubila came to mind, and Chickasaw:
In evil plight from fearful conflicts past,
How many more assailants could they meet?
De Soto sent two messengers of peace,

One to the gathered warriors, and the other
To calm the irate Chief. In terms contrite
The envoys cried aloud, so all might hear,
"Peace we desire of you. We will set free
All captives. Let us linger with you here,
Until some comrades who are lying ill
Regain their health and vigor: then our band
Will leave your kingdom." From their council-tent,
After a long debate, the braves sent back
A herald, who replied: "Your words are fair:
Restore our women, and we grant you peace.
Abide within our country till your sick
Their wonted strength regain. Keep ye your faith,
And ours shall stand as true." But the old Chief,
In a dwarf's body nursing a giant's rage,
Still fumed implacable. De Soto sent
The women back with soothing messages,
Saying, "We crave your friendship. Let the past
Rest in oblivion. Why persist in hate?
For Peace is daughter to the King of Heaven,
While Strife, the fury with the bloody sword,
Hath sprung from Satan's loins. Let us join hands,
Proclaiming to our peoples, white and red,
Those mated truths,—the brotherhood of men,
Under the one great fatherhood of God."

Despite these prayers, which moved his stoutest
braves,
The little man, persisting, cried, "No, no,
The stranger wronged me. Bid him leave our realms."
But petted, coaxed and flattered by his wives,
To terms of peace at last he gave assent,
Adding, "I grant the white lord privilege
To wait upon me at my wigwam here;

But hark ye, messengers: say to your chief,
That he comes not in panoply of war,
Nor mounted on his demon steed: he comes
On foot to do me honor, or my lodge
Is barred against him." Hearing this reply,
And trusting that the Chief by tactful words
Might be placated, soon the Spanish Knight
Went forth afoot, and climbed the ladder-steps
That scaled the royal mound. He made his bow
With many courtly phrases, and the Chief,
Ignoring past feuds, hailed him smilingly.

"Abide with us," the old man said, "and let
Thy comrades take our daughters unto wife.
Why wander further? In the path behind
Are lonely graves where sleep thy perished friends:
Along the path before are treacherous perils,
Lying in wait for thee." But then replied
His guest, "Nay, reverend Chief; our feet must wend
Through far-off pryncedoms of the setting sun,
Until we gain our bourn, so long desired,
Though still unfound." Thereat the Chieftain cried,
"Such is the lot of all! To-day thou comest,
To-morrow goest. Here I greet thee now,
But ere this moon wanes, we shall bid farewell,
And never shall we meet again. How brief
And how uncertain is our little life!
At dayspring born, at twilight fled forever!"

De Soto answered, "True: no man can tell
The answer to the riddle of this world;
No key unlocks the gate beyond the grave.
But still my heart recoileth from believing
That here can be our origin or end.

Life, like a sleek and oily publican,
Rubbing his hands, smiling and bowing low,
Welcomes us one day to his hostelry,
But when the night comes, hurries us away
To make room for some other just arrived.
But let not that landlord dream his guest's career
Beneath his petty roof begins or ends;
That guest hath trod an hundred inns before,
And still may tread a thousand inns to come."

"I fear me," said the Chieftain, "That this life,
And this life only, is vouchsafed us. Once,
When but a boy, I heard a redbird sing
By a wild rose, that, fresh with morning dews,
Blossomed above his nest. Ere noontide flamed,
That dew had vanished; at the evenfall
That rose lay shattered, and that very night
A lynx's keen fangs pierced the brilliant bird.
In childish grief I sobbed; but none returned,—
That song, that song-bird, nor that dewy rose.
They tell me thou art wise, dread stranger. So,
I ask thee when that bird, that song, that rose,
Those twinkling dews, shall gladden earth again?
Gone, gone forever! And why not so with man?
He flees, and fleeing, goes to come no more."

"But in thy heart," De Soto answered him,
"That bird still sings, that rose yet blushes; there
Those dewdrops still hang quivering. Through the
years,
Within thy memory's casket are they treasured.
And never shall that bird-song falter, nor
That rose be faded, nor those dewdrops cease
To quiver, while thy pulse beats: but retained

Within thine inmost being, shall they live,
Exempt from death while thou hast breath. As thou,
A mortal, canst retain them still, so God
Can, if He choose, grant immortality:
We are but emanations from His mind;
We live and have existence in His thought;
He wills us into being, and can call
The vanished being back to life again.
Yea, God can recreate us, and retain us
Forever in the heaven of His heart."

This visit over, soon their thoughts were turned .
To the Great River, which the foresters
Assured them now was nigh. That very eve
They took the pathway through the woods, when lo!
Scarcely ten moment's journey being done,
The Father of Waters lay before their eyes.

High on a bluff they stood: anear its base
The Mississippi rolled his mighty flood.⁹³
The lordly river, half a league in breadth,
And flowing gently, parted in two streams
Around a verdant island to the south.
Titanic in his grandeur, yet serene
And placid with a godlike majesty,
The King of Rivers to the Christians' hearts
Brought admiration, awe and reverence.

De Soto viewed with fascinated eyes
The scene before him. Into his troubled soul
There came, he knew not why, a holy calm;
A deep yet tranquil joy surged through his heart,
As with a great thanksgiving hymn to God.
Faint in his ears, a whisper from afar

Assured him that this river with his name
Would be entwined forever:⁹⁴ that this stream,
More stately than the Danube or the Nile,
Would be the artery, in a distant age,
To some illustrious empire, more august
Than that which centered on the Tiber's shore.
Here would be giant cities, splendid halls,
The homes of Commerce, Learning, Wealth and
Power.

Here Art and Science would be honored; here
Would be the haunts of Story and of Song,—
Renowned in lays of poets yet to be,—
Surpassing in romantic legendry
The dome-crowned Arno or the vine-clad Rhine.

He called it The River of the Holy Ghost.⁹⁵
Long after all his men had sought the camp,
Intent on little tasks that closed their day,
De Soto, silent, mused upon the banks
Of the Great River, that, with sacrifice
Of toils and tears, his prowess now had won.
Recumbent in a dim, secluded spot,
As in a sanctuary, he was lulled
Into benign repose. Far to the west,
The setting sun in benediction hung,
And burnished heaving waves with melted gold;
Above the vast, deep western wilderness
He paused, then sank, and left the quiet world
To rest, to meditation and to sleep.
The brilliant gold of sunset deepened slow
To orange; then the fragile floating clouds
Took chastened tints of faded rose and pearl.
The chirp of crickets beat with drowsy notes;
The cadence of cicadas, like a dirge,

Sighed through the unillumined forest gloom;
The requiems of lone thrushes pined and yearned
At rustic altars of umbrageous woods,—
Soft evensongs at gentle evenfall
For euthanasia of departing day.
Through haunts sequestered and forsaken stole
The sundown shadows; from its rich maroon
To ashen twilight waned the afterglow.
Soon melancholy purple dimmed the skies,
And through the vesper gloaming, tremulous,
The fair-faced, timid stars came one by one.
The gray-winged gulls wheeled slowly, homeward-
bound.

Then solemn Nightfall, like a Sibyl, came,
And in one great libation, from her urn
Outgushed the darkness over earth and heaven;
But still De Soto mused beside the stream,
Immovable—in silence,—lost in thought.

Long kept he there his vigil; but at last
His weary brain was overcome: he slept,
But sleeping saw a vision of this land
As it should be in far-off years to come.
He dreamed he saw his River flowing on
Amid the stateliest realm of all the world.
Gigantic bridges spanned it; vessels swam
Upon it like great sea fowl; on its banks,
Like iron-armored dragons, fettered fast,
Devouring fire, and breathing smoke and flame,
Yet tamed, and made man's most obedient slaves,
Black forge and furnace wrought their miracles.
He looked upon the fields, and yellowing grains
Seemed golden oceans rippling far away.
Then fleecy cotton glimmered on the scene,

As though white clouds had fallen down from heaven,
And scattered through the hills. Here flocks of sheep
And herds of cattle grazed the meadows: here
Were orchards bending low with blushing fruit.
Here happy homes, the haunts of innocence,
Of love and peace and plenty, decked the land.

Still further peered he through futurity.
The scions of this country had achieved
Such wonders as made real all the dreams
Of Sindbad and Aladdin, and eclipsed
The feats of Perseus and of Hercules.
A wisp of vapor, frail and delicate
As airy cobweb tangled in a flower,
Became a power of supernatural strength,
Immured in iron, manacled in steel,
To bow before them as its conquering lords.
So, like the meek, gigantic elephant
That draws the chariot of the prince of Ind,
It led their car in triumph. Or athwart
The vasty oceans, arrowy in speed,
It swam, outrunning Neptune's foaming steeds,
And making sundered hemispheres as one.
It brought them snowy pelts of polar-bears
From Arctic glaciers; heaps of luscious fruits
From sweet West-Indian orchards; cinnamon
From groves of Java; silks from Ispahan,
And ivory from the sources of the Nile.

They carried lightnings, fettered, in their hands,
Or loaded them with burdens. In the night
They wove them into aureoles of flame,
Or fashioned of them scintillating blooms,
That made at gloaming an elysium

More splendent than the gardens of the dawn.
Again, the nimble fluid at their hest
Became a Hebe, lily-footed, swift
As that divine cup-bearer of the Gods,
Or, like an Iris, bore their messages
Above the islands and the continents,
On plumes more light than wings of butterflies.
Though severed by a thousand jealous leagues
Of mountain, desert, wold and wilderness,
Converse they had with absent ones at will,
As though they saw each other face to face.

They laid great cables, and beneath the sea
Their salutations swam, usurping realms
Of frightened nereids; by the starless caves
Where sea-nymphs combed their green, pearl-spangled
hair.

It roused the merman in his darksome grot;
A monster of the deep, half-man, half-fish,
With barnacles and cockles overgrown,
He left his couch of seaweed and of moss,
And puffed and spewed and snorted, while his mate
Leaned from her throne of coral, bending down
Her sea-shell ear against the fragile strand
To eavesdrop whispered messages of flame.
But far below the porpoise and the shark,
The leaping dolphin and the spouting whale,
Through ocean's never-changing emerald night,
On fiery wings unquenched of chilly brine,
The tidings hurried, bringing side by side
Iberian headlands and Floridian shores.

Again, these men had mastered Space and Time,
Till verges of the world appeared in reach.

Men's likenesses they made, and reproduced
Through fingers of the lightning far away.
Pictorial scenes they drew of Afric sands,
Gold-diggers of Australian nether-worlds,
Of Greenland icebergs, equatorial palms,
Bleak steppes of Tartary, and auroral flames
That glitter in Antarctic realms of snow,
And vivid, vital, moving on a screen,
Revealed them unto throngs in distant lands.

They likewise wrought them cunning implements
Wherein they prisoned sounds,—an infant's croon,
The trill of bird, the rustle of a leaf,
The tinkle of a gittern, tune of harp.
And like the butterfly in amber sealed,
Or fragile fern-leaf prisoned in the rock,
That spans the centuries from a bygone age,
Their frailest whispers outlived empires; songs
That else were transitory as the winds,
Lasted as long as everlasting hills.

Again he looks. These never-daunted men
Have conquered dizzy amplitudes of air,
And proved themselves the Vikings of the skies.⁹⁶
They fashion airships, and they cleave the clouds,
Claiming dominion over fields of heaven
As over fields of earth. The sharp-eyed hawk
Angrily circles around them; the eagle
Darts at them viciously; the snowy crane
In her swift flight glances a moment back,
Frightened to see her earth-born rivals. Oft,
The Queen of Air, jealous of such great feats,
Dooms the brave men to death. At giddy heights
Snapping their slender crafts like brittle straw,

She hurls them forth,—and lo! the gallant souls
Plunge headlong from the skies. But not dismayed,
Others step forward: these the attack renew,
And subjugate the firmament. At last
Their galleons cleave the heavenly blue above
As Spanish galleons cleaved the blue below.
So, like the albatross that sleeps a-wing,
Amid the tempest's flashing thunderbolts,
And over angry oceans lashed to foam,
Speeds on the airship with its human freight
Sleeping secure through raging elements.

And now he sees this Empire's sons explore
The depths of ocean: far beneath the waves
Dive down their slender boats, and dart away
Through the dim briny wilderness. They match
Feats of their brethren who have soared through
air,

Swimming with fishes as those flew with birds.
Down, down beneath the billows, in his dream,
Descends the Spanish lord, accompanied
By those adventurous spirits yet unborn.
What wonders greet them! With what wild amaze
Those denizens of ocean stare and stare
At the invaders of the deep! He sees,
Floating through fields and forests submarine,
Slim fishes dotted like a pheasant's plumes,
Or spotted like a peacock's train: here glide
Fishes bright red, like scarlet tanagers,
Or white and crimson, like gay cockatoos,
While others, orioles of ocean, flit
Splendid in orange and in sable hues.
Some, hideous, hump-backed, spiny, are adorned
With beaming eyes,—big red and yellow globes

Of ruby or of jasper: others still
Turn on the intruders weird, resplendent orbs
Of moon-white pearl with opalescent flames.
Here sweep the parrot fish in radiant green,
With rosy mottlings and with saffron zones,
And angel fish, in purple, pink and blue,
Glowing like gorgeous birds of Paradise.
Some steal among the silent coral woods,
Or seek the caverned rocks for solitude.
Some, palpitant, hang midway in the brine
Like stately-pinioned eagles poised in air,
And pierce the blue night of that ocean-realm
With starry beamings of their Argus eyes,
Amazed to see the conquest of their world.

And now he seems to soar to dizzy heights,
And view the far Peruvian mountain-peaks.
There, where the patient, slowly-plodding mule
Once groaned in crawling up the steepy cliffs,
Flogged, cursed and chided by the muleteer,—
The people of this late-discovered land
Have builded highways of engirding steel.⁹⁷
And there, like iron chargers, climb their cars
Amid the clouds, in everlasting cold,
With lonesome condors, wild vicuña herds;
Through snowstorms falling on eternal snows;
By red volcano-cones, that lift their flames
To match the dead day's crimson afterglow.

He looks upon the green West-Indian isles;
The tropic zephyrs, once miasma-fraught,
Are clarified of all their noxious germs;
For lo! this people coming from the North,
Have freed them from the venom'd Pestilence,—

That Basilisk whose baleful glance is death,—
Leaving their realms unshadowed of his eye.

Again, he looks on shores of Darien,
Seeing gigantic derricks, harrows, drills,
And panting engines, driving mammoth plows
That burrow in the bases of the hills,
Dam up the rivers, quell insurgent floods,
And make a royal pathway unto ships
From sea to sea. He seems to hear a voice
Crying aloud: "*As once Pedrarias barred
Hernando's soul from the soul of Isabel,
So hath the land of Darien barred these twain,
Enamored oceans that have yearned to wed,
Till now Columbia's sons have leveled down
The wall of ages. Now the wedding feast
Stands ready, and the great Pacific robes
In garments of the bridegroom, for he claims
The queenly-browed Atlantic as his bride.*"

Again he looks, and sees this Nation's sons
Under the bleak skies of the Northern Pole,
Where wild winds, (phantom spirits of the lost,)
Sweep wailing by forever; where the sun,
A feeble candle in a burial-vault,
Gleams coldly, and the dreary year bestows
Six joyless months of day, six fearful night.
There glints the lonesome pole-star overhead,
And over shroud-like snows, the northern lights
With glittering daggers stab the shuddering dark.
But Boreas, King of Storms, now hurries forth
From windy caves in mountain-peaks of ice,
Goaded with jealousy; about his face
And in his eyes is wildly blown his hair,

Whereon the snowflakes scatter; down his breast,
Bristling with icicles, sweeps gray his beard.
He sees the pale-faced travelers from afar
Invading his dominions; at their side
The low-browed, stooping, dwarfish Esquimaux
Are begging to return, and at their feet
The shaggy dogs, sprinkled with falling snows,
Are whining and are howling in dismay
At scenes so unfamiliar and so stern.
But in those vast unbroken solitudes
Of unrelenting cold, the travelers
Stand firm and fear not; they will not return
Until the goal is reached! And now a voice
Proclaims aloud: "*As once Hernando's feet
Strode onward bravely, though along their path
Nature wove snares and dug deceptive pits;
As once Hernando's heart alone stood firm
When comrades urged him to confess defeat;
So these men, learning of his lesson, faced
The far North with its terrors, and refused
The supplications of their savage guides
Who begged them march no further; and they trod
Through icy realms of desolation, wilds
Where God Himself appeared a stranger; there
They found the eyrie of the Northern Star.
Earth, the veiled Isis, shall uplift her veil,
And the Unknown shall be unknown no more!*"

Recluse and cloistered Secrets in their caves
These men surprised; forth from their hermitage
They dragged them by the hair, and made them serfs;
And giant Forces, slumbering in their lairs,
They bound, and made the servitors of Man.
Like serpent-charmers using magic arts,

They captured deadly Powers, and drew their fangs,
Or fondled them as playthings free of harm.
A wizard wand they waved, and at its call
Uprose the spirits ruling sea and land,
To run on errands as obedient thralls.

But highest, noblest of their deeds for good,
Amid the gloam of obsolescent creeds
They preached the gospel of the Law of Love.
They strove for liberty to worship God
As conscience guided; but while just to heaven,
Forgot they not the sacred rights of Man,
Nor failed they evermore to teach and preach
The Brotherhood of all Humanity.

So then the dreamer thought of Codro's words:

*"What great achievements shall that people's be!
Merlin shall be outdone,—yea, at their deeds
Merlin, the demon's son, shall shrink abashed,
Confessing that his own black arts appear
Beside them but the triflings of a child."*

Again, amidst his evil plight, he felt
What solace was there for him in that thought
Of the old sage: *"In failing thou hadst won;
In losing thou hadst gained a victory
Well worth the struggles of a demigod."*

And consolation for his present griefs
Lay in that other utterance of the seer,
"A noble failure shames a bad success."

At last, the dreamer stirred: moving, he woke,
Startled to find himself alone. He glanced
Quickly about him. Now the glorious dream
Had vanished,—but the world was lovely still.

Lo! all the east was rosy; night had fled:
Cool breezes rustled through the leaves; the grass
Twinkled with dews; the birds were all awake,
And earth and heaven were thrilled with songs of
dawn.

BOOK XXIV

Crossing the Mississippi—Vain search for gold and silver—The marshes of the river—Fish and waterfowl—Ambuscades of the natives—Some discontented soldiers desert—The Spaniards worshiped—The lame and the blind are brought to them for healing—Prayers for rain are made to them—De Soto's answer—The great drought and the thunderstorm—The Prairies—De Soto is lost upon them—Great herds of bison—De Soto's narrow escape from death—He finally returns to the camp in safety—Waning of Summer and the coming of Autumn—Flight of the parrots—Finding of the salt springs—Some die from devouring the salt—Discovery of the Ozark Mountains—The country of the Tunicas and Tulas—De Soto is forced to turn in retreat—His meditations on the night afterwards—Discovery of the hot springs—Juan Ortiz falls ill—De Soto in vain seeks to save him, and he dies.

THE Spaniards builded boats, and ere one moon
Had passed from crescent unto crescent, all
Their band had crossed the stream. With weary feet
First they marched north, then later ventured west,⁹⁸
Seeking for El Dorado: but in vain
They yearned for gold and silver, for no sight
Of treasure lit their avaricious eyes.
Often the natives brought them shining ores,
Crying, "See here the thing you seek." But no!
All the bright nuggets, at a moment's glance
Proved base, green-crustèd copper. Many a time
Would the barbarians in their eagerness
To haste the unwelcome visitors away,

Say unto them, "Beyond us ye will find
The richest kingdom of the world: march on:
A few days' journey brings you to that land."
The Spaniards, thrilled with hope, would speed away,
Only to find a joyless desert waste
Of famished Indians and their starving curs.
These new tribes, with the same old strategy,
Would point back, saying, "No, the mines of gold
Are in the lands you passed." As children seek
To romp and hide in clouds of morning mist,
Yet running forward, see them fade before,
And turning, view them at the spot they left,
And so, wherever speeding, find them not,
But puzzled and eluded, see them still
Before them and behind them,—so these men,
Like bearded, weather-beaten urchins, found
That wheresoever paused their weary feet,
That spot was curst, though others all were blest.

Vast marshes fringed the river: gloomy tarns
Stagnated in eternal solitude,
And sluggish runnels, marged with sighing reeds,
Stole on in silence. Here on rotting logs
Coiled venomed serpents. Dim and lonesome pools
Made haunts for ghostly herons gleaming white
Through shades of melancholy cypresses.
Here the unwieldly bullfrog hoarsely croaked
At all intruders in his hermitage.
Here waterfowl came flocking: here were fish
So plentiful that natives slew them oft
With blows of cudgels.⁹⁹ One enormous fish,
An hundredweight or more on balances,
Naked of scales, swelled with a monstrous head,
Prodigious mouth and glassy eyes; his sides

For weapons bristled with keen-pointed spines
That wounded with an agonizing sting.
One poked a snout a cubit in its length,
Shaped like a shovel; and another still
Snapped jagged saw-like teeth in frightful jaws.

Wherever marched the weary sons of Spain,
Ferocious enemies in front and rear
Darted with scorpion stings: from boughs of trees
Sang their sharp missiles: mingled with the blades
Of the tall tufted grasses, hostile spears
Bristled but half-concealed: each lake, each river,
Swarming with legions of slim black canoes,
Became a scene of battle. Night and day,
Noon, dusk and dawn, forever on the alert,
The Christians kept their vigils, daring not
One moment to relax in trustful ease.

And if perchance a friendly tribe were found,
His men would beg De Soto to remain,
Moaning, "Why go still further? Here is peace
And rest and comfort. If we leave this land,
Death waits us in the next. O, gracious lord,
Let us abide contented here!" But still
The inexorable leader, frowningly
Would thunder "No! March on!" So, when the
march
Had been resumed, oft would the soldiers find
Some comrades missing, and they knew the wretches
Would nevermore return,—skulking behind
For fear of toils and dangers yet to come,
Apostates from their leader and their God.
Dark daughters of the wilds these men espoused,
And left behind in those vast solitudes

To herd in savage huts, with savages
To roam the desert waste, how oft their hearts
Must have made desperate struggles to forget
Their home, their country, and their native tongue,
Their mothers, fathers, friends, and Christ Himself—
There in the solemn western wilderness!

A simple tribe they reached, whose people came
Worshipping them as gods.¹⁰⁰ Cripples were led
Hobbling and staggering forward, who exclaimed,
"See, we are lame! Straighten our withered limbs!"
And blind men, creeping up with outstretched hands,
Whimpered and wailed, "Give back our sight!"

Some cried,

"For three long moons no rain hath fallen; the fields
Are parching; corn is withered; all the streams
Are dry and dusty. Give us rain, we pray!"
De Soto answered: "Nay, deluded souls!
Bow to no man, born like yourselves, of dust;
Pray to no man, born like yourselves, to die.
Ask of the God who made the skies, for rain:
Ask of the God who made you, to be healed.
All other prayers are lost on idle winds."
What irony was here! They who had limped
In rags and tatters through these desert wilds
Seeking an El Dorado housed in gold,—
A demigod whose glory dimmed the sun,—
Found poor barbarians, weak and pitiful,
Who, like themselves, groping for higher things,
Fell prostrate at the wanderers' blistered feet!
So men will ever on their bellies crawl
Before some Nero or Tiberius
Raised by their own slave-hands to pedestals;
So men will ever eat the very dust

Before base idols moulded by themselves.
The Powers That Be must smile, yet weep anon,
And melt with pity free from touch of wrath,
Seeing the blind men in this blinded world
Grope stumbling, bleeding, bruised,—feeling their
way
With trembling outstretched hands through tenfold
night,
To touch the garments of the Unknown God!

They bided with this people for a time,
Since the fierce heat was such that steed and man
Sank overpowered, and the weary march
Halted from sheer exhaustion.

Long ago
The Flower-Moon had faded; in her turn
The Corn-Moon now was dwindling; irksome days
And tedious nights had passed without a rain.
The Sun, a despot, from his throne of brass
Ruled glaring desert skies without a cloud,
And dreary as a dead-calm tropic sea
Glaring for desert leagues without a sail.

In stifling woods the leaves hung languishing,
And boughs were blighted ere the summer died:
The fragrant sweet-gum with its balsam oozed,
And reddened ere the Turkey-Moon arose.
The thirsty locust buzzed: the katydid
Piped in her shrill and senile monotone.
The withered sedges bristled on the hills:
The wild pinks faded in the furnace-heat:
The dewy evening primrose sadly drooped
Her odorous yellow buds through blackened leaves:

The scarlet butterfly-weed burned lonesomely
Through hazy clouds of suffocating dust:
The sickly wild bean trailed with shriveled pods:
The bursting capsule scattered out its seeds.
The air hung feverish; over stubble-fields,
A quivering, curling fluid, steamed the heat.
Amid that tanned Sahara's torrid blaze
The lizard panted on the bleaching stones,
The sparrow panted on her spear of grass,
The dogs lay panting under wilted weeds,
The horses panted in the sun-dried stream,
And men lay panting under yellowing trees.

Deflowered and defoliated plains
Lay sunburnt like a panther's reddish skin.
And gazing upward at the Libyan skies
That glared upon her fierce and pitiless,
In supplications for relief appeared
The wishful, wistful, haggard face of Earth!

The medicine-man strode forth, commanding rain.
His painted face leered like a hideous mask;
Upon his head a pair of bison-horns
Curved imp-like from a vulture-feather crest;
A necklace strung with alligator-teeth
Hung to his bosom; and a rattlesnake,
Swollen with poison, twined his monstrous coils
About the shoulders of the sorcerer,
Soothed into tameness by some wizardry.
The conjurer shot his arrows at the sun,
Yelling, "The drought must end! Come forth, ye
clouds,
Or ye shall feel my wrath!" No cloud arose.
He shook a gourd wherein were rattling peas,

And beat a drum hewn from a hollow tree;
Still burned the sun, disdainful. Then he heaped
Dust on his head, and shrieked and groaned and
sang;

He gabbled and he babbled; but no rain
Fell at the summons of his dissonance.
Shamefaced, defeated in his witchcraft arts,
He muttered and he mumbled, slinking off,
Derided by his sometime followers.
A squaw, half-crazed, bearing a half-dead babe,
Rushed in delirium through the arid fields,
And lifting up her feeble sick pappoose,
She cried aloud, "Rain, rain, or he will die!"

In time, when efforts ceased from sheer despair,
As though to please its own capricious will,
The sky began to lower; scurrying clouds
Darkened the brazen glitter of the sun.
Low muttered distant thunders. Soon the air
Grew hushed with apprehension, then, aroused,
Its wavelets rushed with grateful coolness. Now
The Tempest, like a savage lover, rose,
Appalling, huge and hairy, masculine,
To claim the Earth, his long-expectant mate,
Eager yet shrinking, anxious yet afraid,
Fain and yet timid, in her woman's way.
And as a lion of Numidian sands,
Black-maned and shaggy, of ferocious mien,
Strides forth gigantic over burning wilds
Of Afric deserts to demand his spouse,
And ramps and roars till all the barren waste
Shakes under him, beholding as he comes
Terrific courtship, frightful dalliance—
So rushed that Thunderstorm upon the world.

The tyrant Sun was disenthroned; the skies
Were blotted by onrushing pitchy clouds.
Anon and ever, fitful lightnings flashed
In bright scintillas, then in tortuous lines,
Like glittering rivers mapped on scrolls of heaven.

Now come the awful thunders, peal on peal,
Concussion on concussion, crash on crash,
That set the hills a-tremble, shake the huts,
And deafen with their terrifying roar.
A dragon with prodigious phantom wings,
And crowned with flames, sweeps on the conquering
Storm,
And like a vast, resistless billowy sea,
Down comes the sweeping deluge of the rain.

For hours it fell in torrents: after noon
Its fall was gentler: gratefully it poured,
Reviving and refreshing thirsty groves,
And fructifying parched and sterile fields.
The stalks of corn, half-yellowed from the heat,
Regained their youth, living their springtime over;
They clapped their slender glossy hands in glee,
And gamboled with the raindrops pattering down,
Seeming to laugh and dance for very joy.
The Spanish youths stripped naked; rushing out
Amid the downpour of the cooling flood,
And wading with their bare feet in the streams,
They shouted, romped and sported merrily,
Hilarious as a throng of boys from school.

A rainbow with celestial hues proclaimed
The bridal of enamored Earth and Heaven.
In watery emerald and in violet

And orange it was vested; at its side
Its fragile duplicate revealed the tints
Of crocus and of lilac and of rose,
In dimmer beauty. Unto man it seemed
Resplendent as an arch of triumph, curved
Above the everlasting throne of God,
Proclaiming victory over Death and Sin.

In time they reached the prairies. Here, one day,
De Soto, deep in thought, from camp estrayed.
So, lost in dreams, and heedless of his course,
League after league he rode. But, when aroused,
He saw the sun at noon, no tent in sight,
Vast plains around him, not one friendly path,
And never a landmark lifting to his aid,
He grew alarmed, and seeking to return,
Vainly endeavored to retrace the steps
Whereby he first had wandered forth. At length,
Rambling and indistinct, he spied a trail
Of tracks of bison; this allured him on
With false hopes, ever farther. Thus confused,
Dazed and confounded, roaming here and there,
He murmured, "I am lost. What shall I do?"
Nothing was there to guide him: by the sun
Of noontide, neither might the north from south,
Nor east from west be known: no tree appeared,
No stream nor hillock: all about him lay
The great green prairies,—boundless,—measureless.

Had not his soul to everything been blind
Save peril fraught with deep anxiety,
No sight more lovely than those grassy leas
Could have enthralled him. Decking all the world,
A field of Eden waved caressingly

In soft and gentle green. With hand in hand,
As in a dream, tripped smiling Peace and Calm
Over the heaving bosom of the plain.
Well might one feel that since the world began,
No fire, no storm, lightning nor thunderbolt,
Nor yet the clash of brazen arms of war,
Those dim and sweet elysian scenes had marred.

The pale green of the undulating fields
Was sprinkled over with many-colored flowers,
Poetic and enchanting. Brilliant plots
Of orange and of scarlet, like rich scarfs
Adorning once some oriental queen,
Flecked the soft verdure of the smooth champaigns
In gay confusion. Meadows moist and dark
Marshmallows had enameled deep in red,
Or creamy white and pink. At other times
The pampas rolled a sea of yellow sprays,
With saffron billows palpitant, that surged
And swelled and swayed around the horse's head,
And powdered all his silken neck and mane
With gold-dust like the sunlit ocean foam.

But now De Soto, roving anxiously,
Turned in impatience from the lovely scenes
That wistfully, with fond alluring arts,
His glance besought. The dappled meadow-lark,
From wild-verbena haunts scared suddenly,
Startled him by her hurried flight: the quail
Wearied his ear like a persistent boy,
Whistling and shouting all the livelong day:
The goldfinch, twittering in his airy course,
Or warbling on his purple thistle-crest,
Teased him with frivolous glee. So vexed he was,

That even the flutter of soft downy wings
Of airy black and yellow butterflies
Circling in lightsome dalliance round his head,
Seemed a harsh noise that grated on his ears.
For leagues he rode, but still his aching eyes
Spied nothing on the earth nor in the heavens
Save two great oceans—one the blue above,
The other green below,—blending afar.

But soon the wanderer still was more alarmed
When in the distance, like a sombre cloud,
A moving line appeared. He paused awhile,
Perplexed, and lost in wonderment. And then
Unto himself he muttered half aloud,
“A band of savages comes on the march.”
But looking more intently, “No,” he said;
“For never in all time hath such a host
Of humankind traversed the world.” Ere long
It seemed a mighty, swiftly-moving flock
Of wild brown cattle: after a moment’s pause
He thought of herds of bison, that athwart
Those western plains in legions numberless
Strode like a murky living ocean, vast
And irresistible, in blinded power
Deluging and destroying everything
Standing upon their way. His fears were just,
For plainly now he saw the swarming droves
Hurrying toward him, threatening speedy death
Under their myriad hoofs.

The brutes, he thought,
Were seeking water. In their frantic haste
To gain the welcome pools and quench their thirst,
What power could stay their march? “When not in
herds,”

Red men had told him, "these wild cattle bound
From men affrighted; but when multitudes
Come packed together, not one brute can flee,
Nor turn to flee, nor even swerve aside:
Thus, driven onward helplessly, they crush
All living things beneath them." Never before
Had he beheld these creatures,¹⁰¹ but his eyes
Needed small confirmation of the fears
Quaking within his bosom. Here they came,
With shaggy humps, brown fur and crescent horns,
A myriad-headed plague,¹⁰² darkening the world,
Stamping and pounding and grinding underfoot
All the green splendors of the plain!

Dismayed,

He glanced around him. What should now be done?
He dared not flee before them, for he feared
That turning in that course, even further still
From camp his flight would lead him. And in truth,
His charger, wearied after many hours
Of wandering, might be overtaken: then,
Under that dread oncoming avalanche
Master and horse would both be buried.

Lo!

Short is his time for action. On they sweep,
Those in the front prodded by those behind,
And those behind by others further back,—
A phalanx tramping on invincible,
A mighty, solid mass, surcharged with doom!

But now his heart was gladdened; for he spied,
Half a league thence, a solitary mound,
Tall, steep, and hard to scale,—the handiwork

Of peoples gone forever. On its crest
Flourished a stout young tree. "If my good steed
Can reach yon hillock ere the herd," he cried,
"Our lives are saved." So he spurred swiftly on,
Eager to gain it. Now the courser paced
Through daisy-dappled meads, star-flowered lawns,
And silken greenswards: to his breast he plunged
Through billowy jungles of cerulean blooms,—
Savannahs of celestial beauty, blue
As azure pools in heaven.

But he heeds not
These paradisa! charms: he hastens on.
See, nearer and still nearer comes the herd,
A vast, resistless body, miles in width!
Birds, routed from their nests, flit on before,
Chattering with terror and distress: two lean
And lanky wolves come trotting hurriedly,
And long-eared hares leap racing for their lives.
But now, rejoiced, he gains the monticle,
Barely in time. His faithful barb, aware
With subtle apprehension, of his wish,
Scaling the steep hill free of whip and spur,
Behind the young tree pauses. Here they find
A safe place, yet so narrow, that the horse
Merely can gain a footing. And they scarce
Have reached the summit, when around the base
Rolls the great herd. With brutal, blundering force,
As sweeps some turbid flood and measureless,
Whirling beneath it in its ruthless course
A lovely vale, expunging all its charms,
And swallowing all in ruin,—so sweeps on
That dusky multitude. Those at the front
Seeing the horse and rider, seek in fear

Vainly to turn; but the others, packed behind
In masses far-extended, goad them on;
So, pushed and thrust and driven, all the drove
Surges compact together, impotent
In its own monstrous, overwhelming power.
Fighting and struggling round the monticle,
Many are crushed and wounded. Some great bulls,
Gored by the horns of those behind, attempt
To scale the mound, but soon they totter back,
Rolling and sprawling and tumbling on the heads
Of others at the base. As when a host
Besieges a stout citadel, some climb
Even to the summit, and are backward hurled
Headlong upon their comrades far below,
So climb and fall those bullocks. As they pant
And groan, and struggle back at sight of man,
They reach so near the Spaniard, that he feels
Their hot, quick breath upon him, while his horse
Quivers to feel the grazing of their horns.

Mile after mile marched on that multitude,
Unbroken, closely packed and wedged together.
The tardy hours passed also, and the sun
Was slowly sinking. But before the day
Had ended, gladly he beheld the rear
Of that great host, that army of the plains,
Straggling in scattered throngs. What dreariness,
What ruin and what desolation marked
The pathway of that horde of shaggy brutes!
They left behind them, not the velvet leas,
The bloomy vegas and green-tufted lawns,
But sombre, dismal seas of trampled dust,
As though a conflagration, sweeping by,
Had burned and charred and blackened all the world.

Since nightfall was at hand, and he had sought
To find the path in vain, he gave his horse
Free bridle—let him wander as he would.
At once the faithful charger pricked his ears,
And galloping onward, neighing joyfully,
Without one moment's pause followed a course
Directed by an instinct safe and sure,—
God's own mysterious gift to speechless things.
The full-orbed moon rose; by her friendly beams
De Soto kenned the forest far away.
With joy he viewed again the selfsame scenes
He had passed that morning. As he reached the
woods,

And rose above the plains, he heard the shouts
And musket-shots of comrades, who, alarmed,
Were seeking for the lost one through those wilds.
So, lustily, he answered shout with shout,
And drawing nearer to each other, soon
The leader and his anxious followers
Stood within hailing distance. "He is here!"
Vasconcelos exclaimed. "My lord," he cried,
Seeing De Soto, "We have searched for thee
All the day long. Now God be praised, at last
We find thee, as we prayed, unharmed!" So then,
With many a hand-clasp, many a hearty cheer,
Onward they sped, and ere the midnight came
Once more De Soto stood amongst his friends,—
He and his old companions, one and all,
Rejoiced and thankful at his safe return.

And now the Virgin, low in western heavens,
Upraised beseeching hands as Summer died;
Pale shimmered through the twinkling firmament
Her heavenly wreath of stellar nenuphars;

Blonde Spica quivered on her ear of corn,
A tear of pearl; like tears of blood and fire,
Antares and Arcturus burned; far north,
In frigid polar splendor, Vega sped
Her mingled rays of sapphire and of snow.
Declined afar from Cancer's zenith fires,
The Sun, monastic pilgrim, wended slow
Through austral paths, chilled from his summer
blaze,—
Bound on that journey which would end afar
On glimmering heights of lonely Capricorn.

Then came wan Autumn with her azure haze,
Her thronging quails, her slumbrous cricket-songs,
Her thistle-downs afloat in dreamy air,
Her auburn sunsets, pensive eventides.
Gone was the poignant ecstasy of Spring,
The bliss of glowing June: despondingly
Drooped mellow yellow leaves, and deeply sighed
Autumnal dirges in dejected boughs.
Kindly and gracious, yet with pallid brow
Chastened, and with her hectic cheeks aflush,
Through wasted bowers trod the care-worn Year.

Passing one region, they observed the flight
Of parrots in a northern course.¹⁰³ So then
Juan Ortiz cried, "A happy omen, this.
For living with the red men, long ago
I learned to read it. Comrades, not afar
Are salt springs, which these birds are seeking. Come;
If we but follow them, in little time
We shall have salt again." For two long years,
The men, deprived of salt, had clamored loud:
Languid and feverish, they had felt its need,

And some had died for lack of it. Well pleased
At Ortiz's words, they followed in the course
Mapped by the flying creatures, and in truth,
Ere morn had faded into noon, they found
Great flocks of parrots gathered in a wood,
Their splendid green plumes glowing brilliantly,
Like emerald verdure of departed Spring
Returned to cheer October's yellowing bowers.
Here were salt springs, and legions of the birds
Were sipping at the waters. By the strands
Of tiny rills the salt was heaped like snow.
With eager hands they hoarded for their use
Great hillocks of the crystal luxury,—
Than gold or silver, treasure more desired!
All gulped it greedily. Two, overgorged,
Turned pale, fell sick, quivered convulsively,
And ere the night came, died in agony.

Now the great prairies ended. Over them,
Gloomy with ancient forests, and austere
In ermine robes of spotless Winter snows,—
Like faithful warders that from age to age
Keep their lone vigil at the hest of God,—
Uploomed the Ozark Mountains. These they reached
And traversed, fording swift and foamy streams,
Struggling up rocky stairways, and again
Descending devious gorges. Then beyond
That desolate range they wandered, hoping still,
Though vainly ever, that their weary feet
Might rest in El Dorado's realms of gold.

The country of the Tunicas they passed,
And reached the Kingdom of the Tulas,¹⁰⁴ where,
Seeking to march still further, barbarous hordes

Stubbornly fought them back. This warlike race
Of Tulas in ferocity surpassed
All other savage tribes ere this beheld
By the Iberians on their whole dread march,
As the fierce eagle in his ruthless power
Surpasses far the petty tyrannies
Of paltry sparrow-hawks. All new-born babes
Among these paynims, from their mothers' breasts
Were taken, and each little face was bound
Tightly in painful bandages. Ten years
The children wore them; so, when cast aside,
Distorted and deformed to frightfulness,
Well might their visages have driven wild brutes,
Shuddering, to flee before them. Women and men
Were tattooed hideously; their cheeks and brows
Were seamed and scarred: from noses, lips and ears
Dangled rude copper trinkets. All had lost
All semblance of their Maker: by their side
A nightmare's demons might have been counted fair.
All other tribes the Tula race abhorred,
And mothers of the neighboring peoples hushed
Their babes by croaking "Tula!" in their ears.

And now De Soto, whose unquailing heart,
Scorning retreat, had made him stand alone
Against his comrades through the weary years,
At last stood conquered: every hope had fled:
So his proud soul surrendered!

On the eve
Ere his lips faltered forth the word "Retreat,"
A rocky hill he scaled, and viewed afar
A blood-red Winter sunset in the west.
Wildly the chill winds, whistling round him, tost

The gray locks on his brow; keenly they stung
His shuddering body; but within his breast
Bounded his heart with keener agonies
Than icy winds of Winter might inflict.
Resplendent as a wild Belshazzar's feast,
Rioting unmindful of impending doom
In a great golden Babylon aflame,
The sunset glowed, flooding the rocky heights
Around him in unearthly glory: thus,
With irony malignant, Nature seemed
To taunt him as she decked in spurious pomp
These dismal scenes of barrenness. Alas!
Like a false El Dorado, from the skies
Those glories dulled and vanished, till at last
Only the sterile desert lay around,
Dreary and cheerless as his own sad heart!
What bitterness and anguish of defeat!
Never, ah never, would his eyes behold
The realms of El Dorado! But forever
Would sound within his ears that fatal word,
That word of shame,—Retreat,—Retreat,—Retreat!

Yet, bedded in the bitter fruit of evil,
Like a sweet kernel, good is ever found.
Late through the night after he bowed to fate,
He kept a lonely vigil. Though his heart
Rebelled at first within him, by and by
He stood half-reconciled. Deeply he mused
On his great Vision by the river, cheered
To know his labors would not all be vain.
And there alone, unto himself he said:
"Volcanoes, with their ashen clouds, and streams
Of lava, bury cities deep in earth,
And yet they treasure through uncounted years,

In those vast sepulchres, great works of art
That else were lost, to be the priceless gifts
From one age to another. In the tombs
Of dead men, after hoary centuries,
Are found the graven gems, or pictured scrolls,
Or tablets, that inform us how men lived,
And loved, and had their being, in that day.
Now, as from out those lava catacombs
The noblest efforts of the past revive,
And from the dead man's dark sarcophagus
The resurrection of a nation comes,
So in the burial of our lifelong dreams
Under the sombre ashes of defeat,
And in the yielding of our life itself,
Millions unborn may profit. O, my soul,
Learn this hard lesson, and so be at peace."

So then they left the realms of setting suns,
And turning to the east once more, regained
The Ozark Mountains. It was Winter still,
And all the range was garmented in snow.
Here they discovered hot springs boiling forth
Amidst a narrow valley; over these
Great clouds of vapor quivered to the skies.
So then De Soto thought of far Peru,
Of Caxamalca with its boiling springs,
And pondered in his bitterness of heart
On Caxamalca's day of massacre.

Juan Ortiz here, suddenly falling ill,
Took to his bed,¹⁰⁵ and weakened rapidly.
So then they moved him to De Soto's lodge,
A rugged cabin, reared of logs and mud,
But warm and snug within: a couch they made

Of skins of bisons and of wolves, and there
In burning fever many days he tost.
De Soto hung about him all the while,
And let none other wait beside his couch.
For Ortiz, gentle, woman-like in soul,
And ever faithful to his master's hest,
Had twined himself around the leader's heart,
Winning a place no other man could claim.
In bygone days, when the Hispanic host
Went into battle, though De Soto sought
Ever the perilous forefront for himself,
He had always sent Juan Ortiz to the rear,
Beyond the reach of danger. For he knew
Juan was unfitted for the soldier's work,
Since he was mild and peaceful in his ways,
Handling his sword and musket awkwardly,
And sickening at his comrades' heartless deeds.

The natives of the country here were kind:
Queer traps and pitfalls they designed, and taught
The white men how to use them, capturing birds
And hares and squirrels. Oftentimes they went
Hunting the bear and deer through mountain wilds
With Spanish knights.

De Soto never chose
Their fellowship: he hunted all alone;
And bringing back ere long a hare or quail,
With his own hands would dress it skillfully,
Then roast it over hot coals in his hut,
And bear it, tender, brown and savory,
To tempt his sick friend's feeble appetite.
But Ortiz, with that fretful childishness
Which makes a peevish tyrant of the sick,

Would cry out, "No, I will not eat it! go!
Take it away!" So then De Soto, hurt,
But knowing that the sick must be indulged,
Would seek to humor him in other ways,
And sometimes with success. Often he brought
Snow from the woods to cool his fevered brows;
From the cabin eaves he broke long icicles,
Which Ortiz ever greedily devoured
To quench the furnace fast consuming him.

The cabin faced the west; one eventide
De Soto watched a splendent sunset glow
Above the snow-clad hills. The forest trees
Clothing the summits, lifted massive boles
Like ebon columns, black against the red
Beyond them. Boughs and twigs unnumerable,
Crusted with icy crystals,—sleet and snow
Half-melted, and then, freezing, blent together,—
Twinkling and sparkling and glittering ceaselessly
With countless turrets, spires and pinnacles,
Made palaces of diamonds in the skies.
Above them streamed the sunset's oriflamme,
Emblazoning all the western heavens. And now,
De Soto, thinking that this transcendent view
Would please the eye of Ortiz, flung ajar
The cabin door, and cried aloud, "Look, Juan!
Our El Dorado's realm is here at last!"
But Ortiz, with that strange, hard cruelty
A second-nature to the sick man, cried,
"How cold it is! I am freezing! Shut the door!"

At last this childishness had passed away,
And Ortiz, nearing death, was left again
With wonted old-time gentleness. His mind

Would wander in delirium to those days
When held a captive in Ucita's land.
"O, do not burn me!" he would cry aloud,
And then De Soto's voice would comfort him,
Saying "Fear not! I will protect thee, Juan."
An old-time habit of his infancy
Now came back to him; he would clasp his hand
Around De Soto's finger in these spells,
As doubtless he had clasped, in childish years,
His mother's finger with his baby fist.
He pleaded with De Soto, as he had begged
His father once, to let him go to sea.

The last day came. He talked and talked again
Of going back to Spain: De Soto wept.
"O Juan!" he cried, "I promised long ago,
When first I rescued thee by southern seas,
To take thee safely home again. See now,
We are returning! In a little while,
With fleet ships homeward-bound, our eyes will beam
To see once more the friendly hills of Spain!
So, Juan, be strong, be strong, and leave me not!
How can I spare thee? In these gloomy wilds,
Among strange men with unfamiliar tongues,
None, save thyself, can guide us. O be strong,
For thou must live to aid us to the end!"

Now Ortiz brightened as the end drew near;
Around De Soto's finger twined his hand;
And looking at his leader wistfully,
Yet trustfully, with childhood's simple faith
In the promise of its father, he exclaimed,
"O, I am weak, and thou art very strong!
Dear master, promise me, since thou art strong,

To take me back again to dear Seville!
Let us go home,—let us go back to Spain!”

But he had gone, and left De Soto there.
The night was coming: in the dusky pines
The crying snow-birds gathered for their rest.
The clouds had darkened: winds went moaning by,
And earth and sky were dim with falling snows.

BOOK XXV

The return of Spring—The Spanish host is again on the banks of the Mississippi—Anasco's Expedition to the south—Flood in the river—Wild animals gather upon the mounds—They are slain by the Spaniards until Anasco forbids all further slaughter—Failure of the expedition, and the return of Anasco—De Soto is seized with a fatal illness—He becomes fully resigned to death—His last counsels and admonitions—His advice to Lulla and Alonzo—He entrusts Alonzo with his ring, to be given to Isabel—His farewell to his officers—Reply of Gallegos—His last communication to Moscoso, who had been chosen as his successor.

WINTER had passed: the crescent Year rejoiced
In blissful adolescence of the Spring;
And like a stranger unto tenderness,
Feeling sweet First Love warm his heart of stone,
She thrilled and tingled through her frozen clods
When April, her boy-lover, pierced her soul
With the keen, quivering joy of youth's first kiss.
Earth's cornucopia overflowed with sweets:
Buckeyes hung red and orange sprays: the phlox
Lifted her purple clusters: violets peeped
Through withered masses of the last year's leaves,
Lovely as ever. Under shady woods,
Green mandrakes, like a pigmy grove of palms,
Made canopies for dances of the elves:
Exhaling sweet aroma, censer-like,
Cream-white corollas of magnolias reared.
From antenatal cells the chrysalis,

Transfigured as a butterfly, came forth
Seraphic in celestial blue and gold.
Fleet-footed zephyrs through the bloomy haunts
Of tangled vines tripped laughingly: wild birds
Warbled melodious lays through all the woods,
And rivulets from icy fetters freed,
Meandered, babbling songs of liberty.

Now after many moons, De Soto again
Beside the River of all rivers paused.
Three years had vanished; yet from Spring to Spring,
From Autumn unto Autumn, and again
From the bright solstice of the Summer flowers
To the pale solstice of the Winter snows,
Not one lone word from Isabel had come
To cheer his joyless heart. Nor had his eyes
Beheld the glory and beatitude
Of El Dorado's realms. Love, Wealth and Power
Had all forsaken him!

“Is the sea near?”

He asked the natives: stupidly they gazed
Upon him, and they only shook their heads
In silence, for they understood him not.
He sent Anasco southward, to explore
The country, and to find the southern sea
Where the stream emptied. But a mighty flood
Swelled the great river to a boundless gulf
Such as the Christians, to strange sights inured,
Yet viewed in wonder. Twenty leagues in breadth,
Its turbid billows with resistless power
Broke down all barriers.¹⁰⁶ Seated on a height,
The Spanish camp became an island-town.
Through marshes, canebrakes, quagmires and lagoons,

Through swamps of cypress dense with matted vines,
Eight days Anasco's veterans toilsomely
Struggled to make their way, but ever failed.
For now the deluge swept the wilderness;
Two fathom deep stood all the forest trees.
Anasco ventured further with canoes,
But soon came rowing back: in all this time
Scarce fifteen leagues his band had journeyed. Oft
Upon their way returning they beheld
Mounds that were islets in the deluged waste.
Upon these little isles were gathered deer,
And wolves and foxes: in the trees above
Were crouched great bears, opossums and raccoons.
Hares thronged in legions: through the shrubbery
Wild-turkeys clucked and gobbled. In the past,
While floods continued, all these helpless creatures
The savages had left unharmed: so now,
Relying on this ancient truce, they lost
Their fear of man, and easily were slain,
Until Anasco, wrothful at the sight
Of such a wanton slaughter, cried aloud,
"Forbear! None but a poltroon thus would smite
These poor wild beings that have trusted you
For mercy! Ye have slain enough for food:
No sportsman turns his hand to butchery."

Now heavier ills impended: for at last,
Seized with a strange, insidious malady,
The offspring of his hardships and his cares,
De Soto sought his couch. In helplessness
He languished many a weary day. At first
He smiled at all his anxious friends who deemed
His illness grave: often he rose from bed,
Staggering with weakness, to renew his round

Of daily duties: stubbornly he sought
To throw his unseen enemy underfoot,
But ever sank exhausted. To his eyes
The light streamed garish, and his burning lids
Closed to repel the painful glare: to his lips
All water tasted bitter: through his limbs
Shot burning heat, and thrills of piercing cold:
His brows ached: dumb and dull pains gripped his
bones.

So he was forced to seek his couch again:
There a hot fever overmastered him.

His mind reverted in delirious dreams
To scenes in far-off Darien and Peru;
Almagro and Pizarro oft he called;
Stoutly he fought for Atahualpa's life:
He made remonstrance to Pedrarias,
Asking the father for the daughter's hand.
Her much-loved name would half restore his mind,
So that, disconsolate, he realized
The piteous crisis of his shipwrecked heart.
Oft he recalled that time in bygone days,
When Codro, reading from his natal stars,
Had told him that within this fateful year
Of his career, as in Balboa's, Fate
Would come to meet him, walking hand in hand
With Failure or Success,—perchance with Death.

After a time the fever left him. Then
His eyes grew clear again. Thus he neared death
With a mind unclouded and a soul serene.
He craved to see the river; so they placed
His couch before the cabin; there he lay
From hour to hour, and gazed upon the Stream

That for all time would be his priceless gift
Unto the Kingdom of Enlightenment.
Through ashen streamers of long-stranded moss
That dangled from the live-oaks' verdant boughs,
He saw the great logs floating placidly,
And watched the white gulls circling in the sun.
From leafy sprays above, a mock-bird's throat
Bubbled with silvery melodies. That day,
Throughout all nature,—river, earth and skies,—
Lay peace and calm unruffled: no unrest,
No discontent, no longing, no remorse,
Was there to vex the mild serenity.

And now a great change came: he viewed the world,
Mankind, and life, and, most of all, himself,
With other eyes. A humble palinode
For old-time dogmas of his prideful youth
Seemed chanted in his soul. For now he knew
That all his sufferings, and this last defeat,
Were only righteous retributions, cast
Upon him in return for all the woes
That he himself in other years had brought
On the mild, weak Peruvians, when he marched
With false Pizarro. So his warlike heart,
Once raging like a lion in its cage,
Grew kind and gentle. Reconciled to fate,
His boastful spirit, that had sought in pride
To lift rebellious banners unto heaven,
Surrendered calmly. With a brow serene
He faced the future, saying, "All is well."
He who had once, in feverish desire,
Roved over half the world in quest of gold,
Now drove the demon Avarice from his heart:
He who had craved the multitude's applause,

Now exiled from his bosom's calm abode
The ravenous thirst and hunger after glory:
He who had scanned the earth with selfish eyes,
Now stood as on a sunlit eminence,
With broader, higher, statelier views than ever
His noblest dreams had dared conceive before.

And, as a setting sun, that, disenthroned,
No longer domineers the blazing skies,
Wheeling his fiery chariot haughtily,
Yet robes in soft clouds whose emblazonry
Of scarlet and of purple fringed with gold
Is richer and more gorgeous than the flames,
Dazzling and blinding unto shrinking eyes,
That decked him in the effulgence of his noon,—
Who sinks with loving farewells of the world,
With evening dews, with odorous evening gales,
Blest by the songs of birds that dared not gaze
Unquailing on his glory at its height,—
So now De Soto, reft of pride and power,
And sinking in the twilight of defeat,
Revealed the beauty of his soul of souls
Till then to bosom comrades undisclosed.
So deeper love and readier loyalty,
Conceived in breasts of those surrounding him,
Strewed offerings at the altar of his heart
More grateful than the tributes Wealth and Fame
In prouder years had scattered at his feet.

He drank the River's rest and quietude,
And over his soul there came tranquillity.
Disturbance and disorder passed away:
No agitation or contention roused
The soothing sweetness of profound repose

That gently folded round his inmost being.
His plans had failed;—the warrior lay resigned;
Death was at hand;—the dying lay consoled.

And now his heart recalled Gallegos' words:
"*Man's truest guide is Fate!*" At last he knew
That Fate had chosen better than himself:
In failing he had won the Prize Supreme.
The longed-for El Dorado,—here it lay!
His own dull eyes had overlooked the goal,
Yet God had called him from amongst all men
To gain this noble empire for the world.

As King of Pioneers his name would win
Laudations of humanity forever.
He who had turned from Cofachiqui's realm
Of luxury, and from Coosa's land of ease,
Had blundered in the selfish sight of men,
And yet the whole world, through millenniums
Uncounted, would acclaim him for his choice.
For no adulterous Helen, nor lustful Troy,
His arm had battled, but aloft had borne
The torch of humankind's enlightenment
Through gloomy desert wilds of savagery.
Alone, unaided by the sorcery
Of fabled thunderbolts of fabled gods,
His labors had been ended faithfully,
And not for Spain alone, but all the world.

To Lulla and Alonzo ere this time
A babe had come. The Governor they sought,
Bearing his tiny kinsman to his side.
De Soto smiled to see the little man,
Half savage and half Spaniard, quaint of face,

Yet fine and sturdy. Then the youthful pair
Received the counsel of the dying man.

"My life hath been a troubled one," he said;
"Hard lessons have been branded, as with fire
And iron on my quivering breast; of these,
I beg ye to remember first this truth:
Those things are best whose price is least of all.
Things needful cost but little; luxuries
Tax high the purse, but higher still the soul.
The good things come by asking; baneful things
Alone are costly. For the light of heaven,
The blue of skies, the green of woods and fields,
The tints of flowers, the shimmer of the leaves,
The glory of the sunset and the dawn,
The starry treasures of the jeweled skies,
God giveth free to peasant and to king.
The dews that quiver on the morning grass
Are more resplendent in their rainbow hues
Than all the brilliants ever dug from earth;
But while these dews are scattered free, those
 gems,
To him who knows their story, seem as tears
Of scourged and beaten slaves, whose grimy hands
Grope for them in the midnight of the mines.
Kind words and friendly faces, truth and love,
Salvation,—Heaven itself,—are offered free.
The pure clear spring refreshes thee for naught;—
The wine which drains thy hoard will damn thy
 soul.
The maiden's heart, which yearns for thee unasked,
Will be thy passport unto Paradise;
The harlot's kiss, which beggars thee to buy,
Will drive thy soul, a beggar, unto hell.

"Again I say to you, this take to heart:
Seek joy at home, and not in wandering.
Magellan set his sails for seas unknown,
And met strange peoples in the far-off isles;
At last his ship, in circling round the world,
Attained the selfsame port from which it sailed.
So shall ye find, when ye have wandered far,
The dearest spot is that ye first forsook,—
Your birthplace, and the place ye seek to die."

And now his heart, with mournful tenderness,
Reverted to his consort far away.
He drew a ring from off his finger, saying,
"Take this to Isabel. She gave it me
When first I left her in that far-off time,
To seek my fortune in another world.
I promised then that we should meet again.
Another yet more distant world I seek:
Tell her, my son, that though that world be far,
My heart shall still be true, and if God wills,
My loyal feet shall seek her side again."

Then came his officers to bid farewell.
Strong men they were, but when they reached his side,
Their dark cheeks, furrowed with the scars of war,
Were tear-stained like the cheeks of girls. Of these,
Moscoso and Lobillo and Tobar
Had been his fellow-soldiers long ago
In far Peru. Moscoso and Tobar
Had felt his stern displeasure; but that wrath
Had passed away forever: each man wept
As though his own twin-brother spake farewell.
De Soto faltered, "I beseech of you
Forgiveness of all anger, all harsh words,

And rigorous discipline, that in the past
I have inflicted on you. Yet ye know
That though the tasks I set you have been hard,
Never, O comrades, were they heavier
Than those I gave myself. But now at last
My leadership is ended: ye must choose
Another in my place. Whom do ye name?"
They chose Moscoso, and he gave assent.

"Wherever he may lead thy steps," he said,
"Go not for sake of gold, as I have gone.
Take warning from Pizarro's fate: he burned,
He slew, he pillaged for that baleful prize.
He lied to win it, lying to himself
And even to God. But Truth at last prevailed,
For Truth is Truth as long as God is God.

"And gold and silver make no empire great.
The hand that sows the seed, that reaps the corn,
That feeds the cattle, drives the flocks afield,
That throws the fisher's net in tumbling seas,
Brings to the multitude more ample wealth
Than all the spoils of plundered Mexicos.
And this learn also: on their own strong hearts
And willing hands, our people must rely:
The tinsel pomp of wealth destroys the State;
Great sons alone can make a nation great.

"But now my time is come. I give you thanks
For truth, painstaking, loyalty and love
Wherewith ye served me. Pray for me, I beg,
For soon before God's Judgment-bar I stand,
With many sins laid heavy on my soul.
I would that I had lived but long enow

To pay the debt I owe you; but your God
And mine, will surely leave you not unpaid.”
Speaking for all, Gallegos then replied:
“Master, with tearful eyes we see thee go;
Our hearts are grieved that thou shouldst be debarred
From winning that for which we sought: but still,
In this our life, the bitter spoils the sweet;
The blessing ever is shadowed by the curse.
He who first goes is favored: though we weep,
Our sorrow is but selfishness, since thou
Escapest trials we have yet to face.”

Then came the humble soldiers of the ranks,
A score each time together, and they saw
Their master for the last time. Lovingly
He smiled upon them as they slowly passed,
Sobbing like boys. When all the men had gone,
The leaders followed them. Moscoso lingered
To take his parting words. De Soto, faint,
And drawing near the end, with solemn tones
Like deep, dim murmurings of a far-off sea,
Poured out his soul,—in unaccustomed thoughts
From one so warlike in that warlike age:

“Moscoso! hearken ere I pass away.
My soul has been deluded; so has thine.
Long have we fought the savage, long have sought
To raise one realm alone to pomp and power.
To-day we rate that man an enemy
Who dwells beyond a fancied line; our friend
Is he who dwells within it; patriotism,
That catch-word of a selfish brotherhood,
Is rounded by the colors of a map.
The dusty chart, scrawled by forgotten hands,

Showing a latitude or longitude,
Has governed laws of hatred and of love.
But there is yet a halcyon time to come,—
A morn more glorious than all morns before,—
A morn resplendent that I see afar,
Though it shall dawn when I am clay in clay.
In that blest day all nations shall be one,
And one resplendent banner wave for all;
Frontiers and boundaries then shall be no more,
And Fatherland shall mean the whole wide world.

“We wade green scum of the tropic swamp,
We quaff the fevers of its fetid air,
We brave the tiger and the hooded snake,
To force the naked savage from his gods:
Yea, blind ourselves, we seek to lead the blind,—
While still the Great Unknown is hid from all.
O brother, let the Lapland peasant dream
His snow-clad forest is a paradise;
Still let the Congo blackamoor declare
His snaky jungle a fit abode for kings;
Still let the millions of Cathay believe
Their yellow rivers lave celestial fields;
But let us look with clear, impartial eyes
Beyond the hilltops of our boyhood home:
And let us not forget that pious souls
To-night will bow to other gods than ours,
In awe, in reverence, and in loving trust,
That shame us in the boldness of our sins.

“All earthly idols of all earthly shrines
Are adumbrations of the One true God.
That savage of the trackless woods who leads
The famished hunter to his hut, and shares

His little store of food, is the son of God,
And mine own brother. And believe me, friend,
That Hindu mother, who, when famine comes,
Dies that her child may gnaw the crust and live,
Is sister of the meek and lowly Christ,
Albeit her ears have never known His name,
Albeit in death she kneels to wood and stone."

Then, as in dreams, his dying words invoked
His brother of the ages yet to be:
"O brother of that far, resplendent time,
When only Love is Force, when Right is Might,—
O brother of that undiscovered day
Which sees the lion playing with the lamb,—
Remember us, thy brethren of the past,
Who groped in darkness and in doubt and fear!
Our rude ancestors rose above the brute,
And stumbled slowly up to higher things;
To-day we struggle for a better life,
Although thy glory we shall never share!
Remember how we strove and fought and bled,
While still the old, old Adam clutched below,
And sought to stay us as we climbed the height,—
All this remember in thy glorious age,
And breathe one word of kindness for us here,
Who prophesied and hailed you from afar!"

BOOK XXVI

The Dying Warrior, falling into slumber, has a last great vision—
By the Spirit of Codro, he is led into Heaven, where he is
allowed to view the glories of that high abode, and see the
beginnings of Creation at the hands of the Maker—They then
return to Earth, where he is permitted to look upon the Past as
the Present, so that the history of the world, from the dawn of
its existence, passes before him—The smouldering Planet—
The chaos of stormy seas—Upheaval of volcanoes amid great
convulsions of nature—The first crude forms of Life—The
tiny creatures of the tepid waters—Shell-fish—Coral reefs—
The Age of Fishes—Great forests arise—The first insects—
The Age of Reptiles—Monsters of the land and sea—Earth
is again shaken with great convulsions—Volcanoes and earth-
quakes—Coming of the mastodons and mammoths—The
first birds appear—The apes and gorillas—Primeval man—
A wintry age drives him to caves for shelter—He learns to
wield the club and fling the stone—He learns to make fire by
striking flint with flint—The first home-circle—He spares
his mate and sets his enemy free—He draws the first picture
—The beginning of religion—The funeral in the cave—The
first hope of immortality.

ALL day the leader, though anear his end,
Reposed in quietude. As the night fell,
Still fainter grew his breathing, and more slow
The tremor of his thread-like pulse: his eyes
Closed in a tranquil slumber, as though sleep,
Melting, would blend insensibly with death.
But as he slept he dreamed, and in his dream
The meaning of his own life, and the life
Of all humanity stood forth revealed.

Up, up through dizzy firmamental heights
He seemed to soar; a wilderness of clouds
In breathless flight he cleaved; the crescent moon
Swam like a golden boat beneath his feet;
The zodiac he traversed, and beyond,
In a vast universe of alien worlds,
Trembling and pale with wonderment and awe,
He wandered as a pilgrim, all alone.

Suddenly he halted; for he heard his name
Called by a voice behind him: as he paused,
Dimly he felt that some one known of old,
A comrade lost but unforgotten, sought
To overtake him. Turning in amaze,
Codro, his old companion of the past,—
The dear, dead past of sweet and bitter youth,—
He now beheld. Ah yes, the same old friend,
The same old faithful comrade, yet how changed!
Majestic and resplendent, glorified
With light celestial,—where was now the dross,
The earthy structure of the sons of clay,
That once had clogged his limbs and weighed him
down?

No longer rude or awkward or uncouth,
In princely grace he trod. And yet withal,
How like his old self! As a beauteous child
Of an ill-favored father, in his face,
Like a clear mirror, faithfully reflects
Unbeauteous features of his parentage,—
In bright eyes, glowing cheeks and dimpling smiles
Recalling homely aspects of the sire
Transfigured now to heavenly loveliness,—
So Codro yet recalled his old-time self,—
The rugged plodder of terrestrial ways,—

Though dowed with mien seraphic, and upraised
To dignity of archangelic throngs.

"Friend of mine earthly days," the Spirit said,
"I come to lead thee unto higher heights
Than mortal feet, still unrelieved by death
From manacles of clay, have trod before.
Appalling is that eminence which thou
Shalt now ascend; blinding will be that light
Which thou shalt soon confront: thy frightened limbs
Shall totter beneath thee, and thy brain shall reel
Before that scene stupendous: giddily
Shall swim thy senses: then thy flinching eyes,
Dazzled by piercing radiance, in dismay
Thou shalt bow down, and cover with thy hands.
But fear not: I will guide thee safely: then
Thou shalt behold the origin of all
The worlds,—the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars,
And all mankind: the destiny of man
Thou shalt likewise behold. Friend, loved of old,
Give me thy hand."

So saying, in his hand
He grasped his comrade's, and on droopless wings
They rose to heights sublime,—vast firmaments
Unmeasured and unmeasurable,—and hovered
Over gulfs unfathomed, boundless, bottomless,
From sight whereof the mortal shrank aghast.

And now,—appalling thought!—they stood before
The Source of Light and Life Himself. There blazed
Forth from that awful Presence such a flame
As struck the mortal blind: crying aloud,
Over his eyes he threw his hands, and dazed,

Face downward, fell. "Fear not! Arise!" he heard
 His guardian whisper: "I will shield thine eyes
 With such a cloud as will empower their orbs,
 Unscathed, to view these glories." Timidly
 The earthling rose, and lo! before his eyes
 There swam a dewy vapor, soft and bland,
 That veiled them from the fearful splendor. There,
 In such effulgence as ten thousand suns
 Have darted never, burned the throne of God.
 And in that holy sanctuary, girt
 With majesty, beatitude and glory,
 Ineffable, Almighty, sate supreme
 The Ruler of all Rulers, Architect
 Of suns and moons and stars, the Sire of man,
 The Lord of all the worlds, and King of Heaven.

Around Him, in a splendid multitude
 Were gathered angels, arc on radiant arc,
 Circle on circle,—synods of the blest,
 Assemblies of the saints, cherubic choirs,
 Hierarchies of the seraphs,—all alert
 And eager to obey the Sovereign's call.
 Great golden candelabra of the stars
 In twinkling constellations ever burned
 Sweet incense at His throne: around His head
 Great suns, revolving in their orbits, flamed:
 Under His feet rolled softer argent moons.
 Above Him, myriad stellar systems hung
 Their lucent orbs, white, purple, yellow or red.
 Double or triple or quadruple stars
 Moved round one centre, with their mated hues,
 Azure or emerald, like a peacock's eyes,
 Clustered in one adornment. Some, outstrung,
 Sparkled like jeweled necklaces. Aloft,

The broad triangle of the Hyades
Gleamed pendulous: a sheaf of sunlit wheat,
Shimmered the Pleiades. Weird comets trailed
Through the deep heavens their mazeful outblown
hair.

Here galaxies on galaxies displayed
Along the ocean of the universe
Their glimmering strands of gold-dust, where each
grain,

Tiny to view, was yet a giant sun,
Encompassed by a brood of satellites.
Here nebulae in whirlpool spirals cast
Their creamy billows, foamy wave on wave,
Swift-eddying and vortexing round and round
Their centres, to evolve still other worlds.

Now as the earth-child gazed, the Almighty wrought
Wonder upon wonder: at His dread command
Huge worlds rose into being: suns and moons
And planets sprang to life: with His right hand
God sowed the stars as the sower sows the seed.
Vast nebulae, impalpable, unformed,
Misty and hazy, at His touch divine
Swirled round in great volutions, till at last
A glowing nucleus in the centre formed;
Then, kneaded by His fingers artfully,
Like shewbread moulded in the priestly hand
At Zion's holy fane, each seething mass,
Condensed, compressed, whirling into a globe,
Became a fiery sun. These suns He flung
Far into space, and they in turn cast off
Fragment on glittering fragment, that revolved
Around the mother-sphere: in girth enorm,
Or pigmied, these young luminaries glowed

With varicolored zones, or mottled hues,
Or reared Saturnian haloes. They in time
Threw off still other fragments, that became
Soft moons to shed white radiance through the night
Over the elder worlds that gave them birth.

Now all the planets left their parent suns
Candent with fiercest heat: as æons waned,
Slowly they smouldered, darkened, and became
Abodes for living things. But ere that day
Uncounted ages seemed to pass: had time
Been measured as on earth, a thousand years,
By still ten thousand others multiplied,
Had not been half so long. The lustrous days
Of Hellas, matched with those millenniums,
Seemed shorter than a lover's sigh; the sway
Of Rome imperial lasted not as long
As a lone bird-note; eras of Cathay
Flitted ephemeral as an errant breeze
Dying in noonday skies.

Then spake the guide:

"Thou seest that thy paltry, puny world
Is but a leaflet in a wilderness,
A sand-grain in Saharas of the stars,
A snowflake in a snowstorm of the worlds,
A drop in oceans of the universe.
Thou seest likewise that no world is born
After six days of labor, nor six years,
Nor yet six thousand years: long epochs fade
Before one blade of grass may peep, or one
Thin piping voice of cricket may be heard
In the lone planet's drear unpeopled waste.
And know this likewise: when one task is done,

God resteth not; for when one labor ends,
Another is begun. Creation's toil
Hath no cessation: finished it may be,
But finished only to be done again,
Over and over, through unending time."

Then spake the guide again: "These hallowed
scenes,

Which never eye profane may look upon,
Presumptuous, and no being dare approach,
Save in profoundest reverence and in awe,
I have revealed to thee. Let us bow down
In gratitude to heaven, and render thanks
For this dread privilege. And then our feet,
Descending, shall revisit that far world
That saw thy birth." So thereupon the twain
Fell with bowed faces, and in silentness,
Yet with the words upwelling from their hearts,
Poured out their souls in gratitude to Him
Who in His grace had suffered mortal eyes
To view such realms of sanctity unscathed
Beneath their dazzling flame. Then having risen,
And made profound obeisance, from the scenes
Of that blest halidom they turned, and sought
Their empyrean pathway back to earth.

Stupendous was the height wherefrom they plunged,
And frightful were the vast abysses, stretched
To gulp their shrinking bodies. But the hand
Of the good pilot held his comrade's fast,
In kindly reassurance. So in time
The earth appeared, winging around its sun
In its small circuit with its little moon:
A petty and a dwarflike sphere it seemed,

Matched with the Titans of the universe
That God to other orbits had assigned.

As they approached their bourn, the guide resumed:
"I will make Time appear as though the wheels
Of his great chariot had retraced the paths
They traveled through the ancient years: the Past
Shall be the Present: I shall make thee stand
As a spectator of Creation: thou,
An earth-born creature, shalt be privileged
To see God's first beginnings at the task
Of raising this, thine own world, from the dead
Unto the living. Stand, and mark with awe."

Beneath them rolled the earth: but over its face
Ramped only wild confusion: darkness hung
Above it, for a mass of dismal clouds
Folded around it like a mildewed shroud
Around a corpse that lies unsepulchred
In a black desert where no sunray beams.
The waters hid the continents: the land
Only upreared above the turbid waves
In islets that great billows oft submerged,
Or swept and drowned in ocean. All the seas
Were steaming hot: thickly the vapors rose
In dreary, drab-like curtains to the clouds
Above them, mingling into one vast pall,
Gloomy, unending, joyless. Dreadful storms
Ceaselessly raged: like steeds that Tartars ride
Fiercely to battle, frightful hurricanes
Careered unbridled: monstrous waterspouts
Gyrated, lifting seas to meet the skies,
And hurling back in overwhelming floods
Their captured worlds of waters. Gulfs and bays

In raging whirlpools boiled: from sable heavens
Deluge on deluge poured: hot currents raced
In serpentine meanderings, pole to pole.
Amid that waste of sea and steam and rain,
And cloud and gloom and storm, Nature seemed
wrecked
In hopeless chaos, hellish anarchy.

But ages passed; and all around the world
Flared great volcanoes, spouting smoke and flame.
The murky atmosphere, lit by their glare,
Seemed the black rafters of a smithy, flushed
By ruddy blazes of its mighty forge.
Ten thousand Ætnas rumbled. From the earth,
As from the heavens, the vivid lightnings leaped,
And thunders to the bottom of the sea
Resounded. Mountains of titanic height
Heaved their huge shoulders up through ocean waves,
And with a deafening cannonading roar
Shot upward to the skies, while at their feet
Bellowed the baffled maelstroms of the deep.
As back the floods retreated, and the land
Encroached still further, dire convulsions heaved
The giddy planet: earthquakes quivered and groaned,
Staggering to lift the mountains. So it was,
In fire and smoke and ashes, to the boom
And clap and crack and crash of thunderbolts,
Earth tossed and writhed in childbirth agonies,
Bringing the isles and continents to life.

Long æons waxed and waned. Then were beheld
The first crude forms of life. In the warm yeast
Of foamy waves, and in the steaming ooze
Along the seashore, frail and tiny things,

Soft jellied substances without a form,
Groped blindly through their tepid haunts. Then
 swarms

Of other creatures, strange and rude in shape,
And sluggish, dull and unintelligent,
Spawned by the million. Shellfish next appeared,
Strewing the sandy beaches. Coral reefs emerged,
Lashed by the spumy breakers. Then were seen
The parent fishes, with their forms grotesque.
Time passed: still other fishes came, adorned
With gold and silver scales, with glittering fins,
Brilliantly specked, or dight with gaudy zones,
Glowing in orange, or in azure gay,
Or rich with purple. All the lukewarm bays
With finny armies teemed: long watery leagues
Surged with the writhing, struggling, living shoals.

Meanwhile, upon the land, grasses arose,
Clothing the rich savannahs deep in green.
A wilderness of giant ferns outspread
Their dense, luxuriant plumage. Princely palms
Lifted their crests aerial: cycads reared
Delicate tufted fronds. Trees magnificent,
Massive and lofty, strangers since to earth,
Amid those melancholy solitudes
Flourished and faded, unbeheld of men;
For in that steaming, dark and rainy air,
Surcharged with noxious gases, never a man
Might stray and breathe and live. And never a bird
Within those solemn forests, nor in shades
Of intertangling boughs above those fens,
Warbled to cheer the lonesome gloom: no sound
Arose to break the silence, save the pipe
Of the first insects, as in shrill, sharp notes

Though tremulous, those tiny choristers
Sang the first matins to Almighty God.

After the lapse of long millenniums,
Great wallowing monsters spouted in the sea,
And reptiles of gorgonian frightfulness,
And girth and height astounding, walked the land.
Here, bony-plated, scaly-armored, swam
A dreadful beast, long perished from the world,
Half crocodile, half shark: yonder arose
Another creature, snake-shaped, terrible,
Lifting a swan-like neck above the deep,
And flashing his brilliant beady eyes in rage
Upon his hideous rival. Then the two
Ferocious dragons, meeting, joined in battle,
Whipping the waters into foam: their blood
Spurled in crimson jets, as their fierce jaws,
Snapping and ripping and tearing frenziedly,
Clashed, fastening in each other's vasty bulks.
Then the slim, snake-formed creature, overcome,
Shrieked, and his swan-like neck in agony
Stiffening at first, ere long drooped low, and fell,
As the dark victor roared with fearful joy.

Reptiles whose feet smote thundrous on the ground,
Strayed through the palm-groves, or in shallow pools
Wallowed in slothful ease. Great lizards crawled
Through the primeval wildwoods: with their jaws
Uplifted hungrily, they gulped and gorged
Fruits that the tallest men of later times,
Lifting the longest spear, would fail to reach.
Here sauntered one tremendous beast, whose front
Sprouted three horns, while on his neck and breast
Clung sheets of horny armor. Still another,

Tough-hided like the grim rhinoceros,
But huger and more horrible, with eyes
Glaring, with gleaming fangs, waded through fens,
Splashing the mire, crushing and trampling down
The slender bamboos, and voraciously
Devouring all the punier snaky things
Crawling within his way. Above them all
Great flying dragons flapped their bat-like wings,
From crocodilian jaws profaning heaven
With chattering like the gnashing of the teeth
In regions of the damned. Never in dreams
Born of unrest or anguish, nor in those
Black nightmares of remorse in guilty sleep
Of traitors, fratricides or parricides,
Nor in the hells that bigot minds portray,
Peopled with griffins, harpies, furies, ghouls,
Vampires and gorgons,—never in them all
Have wandered fiends of aspect more malign
Than those dread creatures of the ancient years.

Again the earth with dire convulsions heaved.
Cloud-piercing mountains leaped to sudden view
While thunders rolled and lightnings glittered. Peaks
Of cyclopean bulk enwrapped in flames,
And stormed the skies with dread artillery,
Hurling forth rocks and ashes, while their smoke
Shed a portentous darkness. Glowing rifts
In the volcanoes gushed their lava forth
In white-hot seething rivers. Craters yawned
Red mouths like flaming furnaces. The world
Rocked with terrific earthquakes, like a ship
Plunging on stormy billows. Chasms immense
Vomited fires of Tophet. But at last,
When the loud clamor lessened, there arose,

Invading the dominions of the sea,
New promontories, capes and cliffs, that smoked
And smouldered, reeled and rumbled. As years passed,
These new-formed lands, cooled by torrential rains
Downpouring from the pitchy clouds above,
Became still other haunts of life.

But now

The great primeval reptiles all had perished.
Instead, there tramped unwieldy mastodons,
Like slowly-moving hillocks. By their side
Wandered the shaggy mammoths, big of limb,
With ivory tusks, and elephantine snouts
Swinging and swaying to and fro. Great sloths,
Sluggish with tons of flesh, crept slowly on,
Insatiate, cropping foliage greedily,
Till leagues of wood were plundered.

In those wilds,

Unmarked of men, like virgins doomed to fade
Unclaimed of any lover, unembraced,
Unkissed and uncaressed through all their lives,
Strange sweet unearthly blossoms hung forlorn.
But now, as if creation woke to heed
For the first time a call to higher things
Than gross existence of unthinking brutes,
It heard the lays of silver-throated birds,
Like heraldings of poets yet unborn,
Warbled from boughs of paradisal trees.

Now in the palm-trees by a river-side
In a green valley, throngs of sportful apes
Clambered and swung and gamboled. By and by,
From the rank jungles black gorillas stalked,

Upright in carriage, but with hairy skins,
Long arms, protruding jaws and canine fangs,
Retreating foreheads, and dull bestial eyes.
With hands like feet and feet like hands, sharp-nailed
As talons of a harpy, up they climbed
Tall forest-trees, building their ragged nests
In loftiest branches. Growling, chattering,
Or roaring, ceaselessly their frays uprose.
Hideous to view, abhorrent unto thought,
How could God call such a creation good?

Then the first man appeared: hairy and huge,
Low-browed and iron-chinned, with coarse, rough
hands

Clawed like the feet of vultures; with a mien
Black and ferocious, lit by cruel eyes
Glaring through tangles of disheveled hair,—
Where was that lordly tread, that princely air,
To raise him over the brute? So in amaze
Cried out the earthling: "Can this thing be true?
Hath man, the favorite son of God, the liege
Of all creation, paragon of earth,
Crown-prince of life, the heir of angelhood,—
In this vile state hath he his origin?
Is this the genesis of one so proud,
So beauteous and so stately? Came he not
Perfect from God's hand, falling but through sin?"

Smiling, his friend retorted: "Ye have eyes,
And Reason to explain what eyes reveal.
These things, in time to come, shall sons of men
Discover, as ye now discover. Yet
Know this: nothing that God hath ever wrought
Is vile or mean. The tiniest ant that creeps

Is God's own creature, lowlier not to Him
Than the superbest lion. This wee tuft
Of grass is His own handiwork, as good
As yon imperial oak. Then, if low things
Make higher, why shouldst thou complain? Why
spurn

The starry nenuphar because its bloom
Springs from the mud of stagnant pools? Why
scorn

Thyself because thine own framework is dust?
Whatever be its source, no living thing
Is thereby made unclean. Why murmurest thou
That man hath fallen not from a higher state?
Rather rejoice thou that the higher man
Hath risen from the lower. Reason says,
*'Better from ape to angel to have risen,
Than fallen from the angel to the ape.'* "

Until this epoch, earth in tropic glory
Had reveled from pole to pole. In arctic isles
Flourished the plummy palm-trees, through whose
fronds

Fluttered the brilliant birds of torrid climes.
But now the scene was changed: the hills were gray
With hoar-frost: under sheeted snow, the plains
In white monotony outspread: wild winds
Whistled across the plateaus: sleet and hail
Swept on in blinding, pelting hurricanes.
The tropic bowers withered; black and brown,
Swayed their dead foliage in the cutting blast.
The brilliant many-colored sunland birds
Died, or dispersed in flight to warmer climes.
The mastodon, with his colossal frame
A-shiver in ungenial elements,

Sank in the snow to perish. Through white drifts
The ragged mammoth wandered, seeking shelter
From hailstones rattling down from leaden skies.
To solid ice the northern oceans froze,
And icebergs from their dead white deserts sailed
Into the equatorial seas. Slow-paced,
And yet inexorable, wide glaciers moved
Southward, and bore before them rocks and trees,
And all things standing within their way. Winter
Gripped the unjoyous world with tyrant hand.

Man, ere this time, high in the boughs of trees
Had built his rude huts: ill endowed for strife,
Here was his refuge from the stronger brutes.
But now the freezing tempest drove him forth
For refuge unto mountain caves. And thus
Forced from his leafy castle to the ground,
Helpless he stood among the wild beasts armed
With tooth and claw more powerful than his own.
Then urged by hard necessity, he learned
To wield the club and fling the stone,—and lo!
He who had been the weakest of the weak,
The prey of every despot of the wild,
Hunted of every hunter, by this art,—
Defence through agency of alien things,—
Alliance with insensate objects—walked
The master of the world. Oft would he meet
The cave-bear in dispute before the cave,
Each claiming right of lordship: hurling rocks,
Or thundering down with his hard knotted club
On his unwieldy foe, soon his right arm,—
Seconded by might of senseless wood and stone,
And thus invincible through borrowed power,—
Would lift triumphant.

But the fruits he loved
In wilding forest orchards now had failed;
So the primeval man slew for his food
Brute creatures that in other years his feet
Had scampered from in terror. Toils he laid
To catch the mammoth staggering through the
snow.

Taking him thus, he kept him as a slave
To bear his burdens, and to lend him aid
In conquering other beasts. "I now recall,"
De Soto said, "that hairy giant race
Encountering Micalusa's tribe in years
Long vanished; and these brutes with straggling
manes,

With curving tusks and elephantine snouts,
Are like those burly creatures of the past
The western giants tamed and made their slaves."
"Yea," answered Codro: "oft these barbarous
myths

Are truer than the vaunted gospel-truths
In myths of nations more pretentious. Friend,
In all religions there is truth and good,
Though overgrown with error. And be sure
Of this: *All Fiction hath a fact for core.*
Those golden apples of enchanted isles,
Sweet-odored, mellow, of ambrosial taste,
By men yclept Romance and Poetry,
Are but the caskets where the seeds of Truth
Are treasured. So the stern dogmatic creed,
Like a hard, bearded husk, shields and protects
The palm-nut, sweet and wholesome, whence shall
spring

The tree of law and love and righteousness,
To feed the starving millions of the race."

Now man, by striking flint with flint, first learned
To kindle fire. Here Codro laid his hand
Upon his comrade's shoulder, saying, "Mark
These first advancements to enlightenment.
For, ere this time man was but lord of beasts,
An ox in strength, a fox in craft, and yet
Only a sordid thing of blind desire,
Slave to his loins and belly. Now behold,
This wintry season,—like a friend disguised
In frowns and scowls, who yet a gift conceals
In hands withheld behind him,—proves a guide
To lead this gross man up to higher things.
For lo! within yon gloomy cave thou seest
The first warm hearthstone, and around it drawn
The first home-circle. Here through winter nights,
When winds go whistling round the rocks without,
And snow and sleet and hail are flying, all
Is warm and snug and safe within. So thus
The rude barbaric family first enjoys
The sweets of social converse. Now their tongues
Are awkward: yet their language harsh and crude,—
A raucous jabber,—shall become in time
More liquid than the melodies of birds.
Behold the first rude home! and yet that home,
That hearthstone, and that circle round the hearth,
That bless our souls with comradeship, are gifts
Of rigorous seasons that we deem our foes.

"And now look further. Mark the creature's mate,
Ill-favored like himself, though weaker. See
Her trembling limbs, see her disordered hair;
Mark well her furtive eyes, that glance in terror
Toward her spouse. Behold him, red with rage,
With knitted brows, with glaring eyes, his breast

Heaving with fury. Hear his angry shouts,
More fearful than the lion's roar. See now,
She grovels at his feet: quivering with fright,
Streaming with tears, she lifts imploring hands,
Shrieking for mercy! See his fingers twine
Into her tangled locks, and see him hale
The screaming creature by her hair! Look, look!
His knotty hand hath clutched her throat! But
yet,
At the last moment, see his face relent;
See his eyes soften. On her throat his grip
Loosens: for the first time he knows Remorse!
For the first time pity hath touched his heart:
He lifts her, babbling words that mean 'forgive.'
For the first time this creature of his lust
Escapes his dreadful anger, and beholds
The kind forbearance of his dawning love.

"Look thou again. The cave-man, having fought
A desperate battle with a hostile clan,
Comes forth victorious. Prostrate on the field
Lies the last foe, disarmed. Round him are strewn
The other foemen, dead. The victor chief
Hears his own followers bidding him destroy
This last poor wretch beneath him. He hath placed
Upon the enemy's neck his foot; his hand
Uplifts the stone axe for a deathful blow.
But see him lower his arm, and lift his heel
From off the adversary's neck! For now,
Despite the wolfish snarling of his tribe,
He spares the victim, and he sets him free.
So here thou seest, for the first time, man
Displaying the magnanimity of God,
And worthy, for the first time, of his sire.

"Behold again. Grasping a sharpened flint,
And cutting on a mastodon's long tusk,
The first of artists with an awkward hand
Draws the first picture. There in rugged lines,
Like the crude efforts of a school-boy, see
The likeness of the mammoth! See his tusks,
His long proboscis and his scanty mane,
Rudely portrayed, yet faithful to the life.
See now the artist lift his picture up,
Scanning his work with pride. This is Art's dawn,
When man first seeks in love to imitate
The wonders of the sovereign Master's hand.

"Now see upreared against yon dingy wall
Of the dark cavern where the cave-man bides,
A rude stone idol; see the barbarian
Before that image of his god bow down.
But smile thou not, nor scorn. For here thou seest
The first blind gropings after Him whose hand
Raised us from dust. What if those rites be strange,
That liturgy uncouth, that lump of stone
Only a pitiful effigy of God?
In this poor weak beginning thou discernest
The birth of man's Religion; here is lit
Devotion's pure and sanctifying flame
That never shall be quenched, but shall forever
Be burning at the altars of the world.

"And now behold: one in that cavern home
Is lying dead. Mark thou his frantic spouse,
Rending her hair in anguish: see his children,
Silenced, and numb with vague, uncertain dread
At their first sight of death. Now his friends come;
They roll a rock aside, and lower down

The dead man to his last long resting-place
Under the cavern floor. Beside the dead
They lay his weapons,—arrows, and a bow,
A spear, a shield, a club. Likewise they place
A dish of food beside him, that the man
On his long journey to the other world
May faint not, lacking food. Despise thou not
Such a vain, senseless deed; but here detect
Man's dawning hope of immortality.
Yea, hope of immortality! That dream,
That longing, that desire unspeakable,—
That bird of plume celestial, singing songs
Of a transcendent kingdom far away,
Hath nested in the bosom of the race,
Never, O never, to be driven in flight!
O who hath gazed on bleak November skies,
Darkened with flying withered leaves, nor longed
For that untrodden region where the skies
Are ever bright, the trees forever green?
And who hath seen the ending of his prime,
The death of all his dreams and all his joys,—
When Old Age, like a ruthless Vandal king,
Leads on his barbarous hordes to lay in waste
The golden empire of the years of Youth,—
O, who hath known such poignancy of regret,
Nor longed for that blest country where the young,
Treading in joyance, live forever young?
Who hath beheld the glory of this world
Crumble to ashes; who hath seen sweet Love
Pallid, and shrouded for the tomb,—O who,
Looking upon these things, hath never yearned
For that blest haven of the heart's desire,
Where Death is summoned unto death, and Time,
Insatiate Time, eats his own heart and dies!"

BOOK XXVII

In the vision of the warrior, long cycles seem to pass—Disappearance of the primeval monsters—Civilization—De Soto's own time—Man's constant struggle upward through difficulties—The Gods of Egypt, Assyria, India, Greece and Rome are seen—The Great Lawgivers, Moses, Zoroaster, Confucius, Mahomet, Buddha, and Christ—All religions are shown to inculcate some good, though error may be found in their teachings—The Gods of the North—Asgard and its golden mansions—Valhalla—Nifheim, and the demons of the underworld—Loki, and his infernal Progeny—Destruction of Earth and Heaven at Ragnarok—The new Earth and Heaven—The final happy destiny of man—Codro's last injunctions to De Soto—He gives De Soto leave to relate the vision only to Alonzo, as the type of the race to come.

A GAIN it seemed that, as the dreamer dreamed,
Cycles elapsed. Like evil dreams of night
That disappear at dawn, those monstrous brutes
Treading the earth when man first walked as man,
Had vanished. Then enlightenment was known.
Egypt in massive grandeur builded high
Her Thebes and Memphis. Palaces and tombs
Rose, miracles in marble: pyramids
And sphinxes overbrowed them all, august,
Austere and taciturn, watchmen of God,
Whose vigil hath no end till Judgment Dawn.
Sidon and Tyre, Carthage and Babylon,
And Smyrna, Ephesus and Nineveh,
Dazzled the earth with glory, or subdued

Old ocean with their dauntless prow. Cathay
Robbed dark eclipses of their evil power,
Their advent prophesying ere the day
Their dreaded shadows fell. Fair Greece awoke:
Athens, the pride of Earth, and deathless Rome,
Proud and imperious, flourished. In their realms
Art blossomed like a peerless purple flower,
Making earth sweet with paradisal breath.

But all these kingly nations fell: decay
Sullied their splendid fanes: their holy shrines
Crumbled dishonored: in a rayless gloom
Of barbarism their noble annals ended.
At last De Soto's own time seemed to come,
When the long night of ignorance was dispelling
Before another dayspring, though the dawn
Was chill and clouded, not as yet arrayed
In the purpureal glory of its prime.

So Codro, turning to his comrade, spake:
"Now, like a Sleeping Beauty, who revives
Beneath the kiss of some romantic Prince,
Enlightenment, under the loving touch
Of this inspiring age, starts, lifts her head,
And opens her wondering eyes. But evil yet
Is dominant: ye scramble after gold
With greediness insane: ye burn, ye slay,
Ye plunder, ye enslave the savage. Lo!
To fiery death ye drag the heretic,
When you yourselves are strangers unto Christ,
And votaries but of error. Thou thyself
Hast thirsted after gold, and thou thyself
Hast smitten the savage, and hast made him bear
Thy heavy chains of bondage. Ah, too well
Thy guilt thou knowest!

“Yet these self-same plagues
Ever must mark the onward course of man:
Such is the stern requirement of the law
Of our advancement. As a caravan
Upon a desert waste and blossomless
Is guided on its way by skeletons
Of those who perished on the path before,
So the great legions of humanity
Pick their slow way by the uncoffined bones
Of martyrs unto truth,—brave pioneers
Who, pressing on beyond their brethren, died
To mark the trail for the great host behind.
And thou, O pride of Spain, O knightly one,
Seeking for El Dorado through the wilds,—
Instead of gold, of silver and of gems,
Thou shalt but find a grave. O son, thy bones,
Like those upon the desert, shall but gleam
To guide the feet of others.”

But the knight
Cried, “Must this be? Can we not speed the day
Of man’s perfection? Why not end the ills
That thus retard the good?” Replied the other:
“Yea, thou canst aid the cause of Good, and bring
The Golden Age thus nearer. But thy might
Can haste that time but little. Ye have raised
In zealot bigotry the fiery stake
To aid your ruthless creed, deeming that this
Would speed the cause of Right. Alas! by this
Ye have the Right retarded. Ye have sought
To teach the savage by the torch and steel:
Ye fail: he hates you: now a spanless gulf
Divides you from his soul. The plans of God
Can not be forced or prodded to their end.

The lily-bud will open in its time,
When genial suns and soft caressful airs
Woo it to burgeon: when impatient hands
Tear open the delicate enfolded leaves,
Only a tattered, blackened thing is left,
Dangling dejected, soiled and spoiled."

Now passed

Before their eyes the gods and goddesses
In many lands adored. First they descried
The banks of Nilus. Slender obelisks
Like needles pierced the sky: long colonnades
Outstrung their massive pillars: high uploomed
The twin Memnonian statues, rigid and grim,
And worn with ancientness, whose reticence
Relaxes only when the sun at morn
Is greeted by their faithful harmonies.
The sacred ibis flitted by; the stork
Waded the shallow waters; far aloft
Circled rose-hued flamingoes: here it was
The solemn and reserved Egyptian gods
In dignity and grandeur held their sway.
Sad Isis, from whose tears the fruitful Nile
Swells to a deluge, sate upon her throne,
A lotus for her sceptre; on her brow
Lifted the cow's horns and the solar disk.
The mummied king, Osiris, lay serene,
Wrapped in the mystic ceremonies of the dead,
While on his head the Resurrection crown
Glittered, a symbol of the life to come.
Here Horus, with the falcon's countenance,
Anubis, with the jackal's head, and Thoth,
Beaked like the ibis, in majestic fanes
Heard supplications of their votaries,

Yet never turned their calm averted eyes,
Nor bended their sedate impassive brows.

Euphrates and the Tigris next they saw
Flowing through pastoral scenes: here Nineveh
Exulted in her marble domes; and here,
Encompassed by the Babylonian walls,
And shadowed by the Hanging Gardens, rose
Still other shrines and altars. Sceptred Baal
With gravely thoughtful air surveyed the world.
Astarte, with the moon for diadem,
And dewy Hesper twinkling on her brows,
Symboled all fruitfulness and fecundity.
Dagon, half-man, half-fish, worshiped of old
In Canaanitish Gaza, here, as there,
Through clouds of incense in his honor burned,
Heard orisons of never-ending throngs.

Beneath the snowy Himalayan peaks
Sweltered the sultry vales of India,
With tiger-haunted jungles. In that realm
Colossal gods of Hindustan they viewed,
Awful in form, monstrous in limb, and armed
With giant power. Exalted over all,
Four-faced, four-handed, lordly Brahma reigned,
The great Creator. On his dexter side
Was Vishnu, the Preserver, who bestrode
A steed half-man, half-eagle. His four arms
A bow, a club, a discus and a sword
Upheld aloft. Forth issuing from a mount
Under his feet, the holy Ganges flowed
Into that sea made sweet by scented gales
From bloomy groves of Ceylon. On the left
Of Brahma's throne reared Siva, the Destroyer,

Seated upon a milk-white bull, and scowling
From five terrific faces; round his neck
Was coiled a mighty serpent; in one hand
He held aloft a trident; in the other
A murderous flaming thunderbolt he clutched.

The gods of Greece and Rome they now discerned
Gathered on white Olympus. Throned aloft
In stateliness and grandeur, with a brow
Imperial, and a keenly-piercing eye
That never slumbered, reigned almighty Jove,
Serene and yet severe. At times he smiled
In lordly condescension, as he bowed
His locks ambrosial, and his hands received
The nectared goblet rosy Hebe gave.
Beside him queenly Juno half reclined,
Stroking her gorgeous peacock, who upreared
Proudly his glinting crest, and, fan-like, spread
The green and purple glories of his train.
Venus, Jove's peerless daughter, at his feet
Displayed transcendent charms,—her snowy breast,
Her softly-curving limbs, her liliated feet,
Her dawn-red cheeks, dewy cerulean eyes,
And glowing tresses, that with golden haze,
In half concealing, seemed revealing, all
The sweets the Queen of Beauty sought to hide.
Her cream-white doves beside her cooed; her swan
Nestled against her bosom, though his wing,
Purer than pure Olympian snows, seemed gray
Beside that spotless pillow. Not afar,
Ceres, the mother of all harvests, leaned
Upon a sheaf of millet; round her head
Circled a wreath of yellow corn. Here too,
Hovered fair Iris, clad in gay attire

Like gorgeous clouds of morning, while above,
Her seven-hued rainbow reared its arch superb.
The golden-haired Apollo, loveliest
Of all the lovely youths of earth and heaven,
Stood with the Muses nine, and from his lyre
Strook melodies that swayed with ravishment
The starry constellations in their spheres.

"Alas!" the mortal cried, "they have all gone,
Those radiant gods of Hellas! Nevermore
On heights Olympian, at their festal boards,
Shall the red nectar, nor ambrosial cates,
Be set before them, that their joyous hearts
May laugh within their bosoms. They are gone,
And going, take to share their exile, all
The youth and bloom and beauty of the world!"
"Nay," cried the other, "though they disappear
From the gross vision of the banal herd,
Yet still they live in fancy; still they flourish
In the heart's kingdom, as in Athens' prime.
O, never shall the gods of Hellas die
So long as lyric, legend and romance,
Beauty and love and sweetness, shall endure:
Dethroned as gods, yet shall they reign in dreams,
Till the last poet perishes from earth."

And now the great Lawgivers of the past
They saw and knew. First, Moses: in his grasp
The tablets graven by Jehovah's hand
Thundered their stern injunctions. Gray as clouds
In gray November skies, his billowy locks
Swept downward, mingling with his mighty beard,
Hoar as a hoar November frost. The next
Was Zoroaster, with his lofty brow

Bended in meditation on one hand,
While a mysterious scroll his other hand
Treasured against his bosom: at his feet
Flickered the holy flame his priests adore.
Here was Confucius, at a table's head
In a great chamber: round the table sat
His followers, hearkening reverently the while
His wise precepts he gave. Mahomet next
Strode forth, a martial prophet fired with zeal
To win the whole world for his God. He clasped
With his left arm the Koran, in whose page
Are all the flaming revelations taught
The camel-driver on the desert waste
Where the hot sun glares pitiless, and the brain
Swoons in fanatic trances that reveal
Secrets of heaven and hell. With his right arm
A scimitar he brandished, threatening death
To all mankind who heeded not his cry.
Buddha they next discerned, placid and kind,
Discoursing underneath the Bo-tree. He
Sought not the sword for ally, but went armed
Only with peace and friendship. Over all,
Christ they beheld, the meekest and most mild,
Standing upon the mount, and there proclaiming
Duty to pray for all, or friend or foe.

Said Codro: "Neither Islam's creed of hate,
Nor old Hebraic chronicles of blood
Can answer future needs. Some olden myths
Sleep, lost in just oblivion: others yet,
Fables of Jewry, or Iranic dreams,
Now darkening in the penumbra of eclipse,
As the long generations pass, must fade
From sight of men forever. The creeds of old

Revealed some truths of God and heaven, but more
Of men who made them: for this truth will stand:

*Tell thou the nature of a people's god,
And thou hast told the nature of that people:
If they be heartless, so shall their creed;
If they be noble, so shall be their god.*

New revelations yet to be shall draw
Man nearer still to truth. But despise not
Teachings of old: to him who cons them well
Sweet are their precepts. True, they speak through
myth;

Yet the myth oft portrays a deeper truth
Than the bald fact. Choose thou the good in all;
Eschew the evil: thou shalt have reward
In gaining that thou seekest. For, be sure,
*Evil or good, beauty or ugliness,
Whatever man is seeking for, he finds."*

And now they looked on far Norwegian shores,
White in the snows of winter. Gloomy pines
Tossed their black branches in the bitter winds.
A wild gray ocean hurled its foamy spray
Against the bleak and barren rocks. Chill stars
Shivered and shuddered in the polar sky.
With rays like glittering upturned icicles,
The keen auroras flung their splendent arcs;
And like a pale procession through the heavens,
Beckoning with phantom torches, mystic lights
Waved their weird ghostly tapers to and fro.

Here the great ash-tree, Igdrasil, held fast
The universe. Under one mighty root
Was Midgard, home of men. Another root
Stretched over Jotunheim, the icy world

Where the frost-giants dwell. The third black root
In labyrinthine coils enfolded Hell,
Dread Niflheim, dawnless kingdom of the dead,
Where the great monsters of the demon horde
Clank their strong shackles and struggle to be free.
At the three roots the serpent, Nithogg, gnaws
With tooth untiring. In the upper boughs
Of the great ash-tree is the home of gods,
Asgard. Bifrost, the bridge of rainbow, spans
The gulf between it and the underworld
Of miscreated monsters, and the host
Of countless dead. Twelve golden mansions rose
In Asgard, where the Norland deities
Reigned awful and sublime.

Towering aloft,
Like a great mountain whose majestic head
Reaches the skies and pierces through the clouds,
Was Odin, chief of gods. Blind of one eye,
Gray-haired and grizzly-bearded, on his brow
Ruled Force and Power supreme. His stalwart hand
Clutched a great staff that reached from earth to
heaven.

Two ravens on his shoulders perched: two wolves
Lay crouched beside his feet. Freya, his mate,
A giantess, mother of warlike gods,
Was seated near him. With industrious hands,
Orion as her distaff, and her woof
The shimmering mazes of the galaxy,
The garments of her royal house she wove.

Loud thunder-peals resounded, lightnings flashed,
And in a cloud the martial form of Thor
Loomed dreadfully. Red were his hair and beard

As the red lightning: on his front austere
Lowered portentous frowns: huge, sinewy
And hairy were his arms and hands. One fist,
Armed with an iron hammer, stood upraised,
Ready to smite; the other held in leash
The team that drew his brazen chariot,—
Three burly goats with wide-extended horns.

Seated beneath that Norland Trinity
They spied the three Norns, demigoddesses,
Spinners who weave the fabric of men's lives,
And fates of deities,—two marvelous fair,
Strewing sweet blessings, and one a grisly hag,
Bestowing bitter curses. Round them all
Soared the Valkyries, beautiful and fierce,
Handmaids of Odin, who above the wreck
And havoc of the gory battlefield
Hover, choosing the heroes who shall die
And be uplifted in their amorous arms
To Asgard, and to fellowship with gods.

In Asgard one vast hall was reared for men,—
Valhalla, joyous home and blest retreat
Of heroes slain in battle. Nigh its walls,
Wandered and grazed Heidrun, the great she-goat,
High as the hilltops, from whose udders flowed
Rivers of mead. Forth from five hundred gates
Issued each day the warriors unto battle,
To taste the fierce, wild joy of conflict: or,
Throughout the deep green forests would arise
Their shouts in hunting, and the bay of hounds,
Their allies, as they chased the bristly boar,
The speedy roebuck or the clumsy bear.
At night the doughty heroes all would wend

Home from the chase or combat, pricked with wounds
Sustained in tilts with rival bands, or worn,
Dusty or mud-splashed from their hot pursuit
Of wild things through the wilderness. And then
Their revels would begin. Their lofty hall
Was hung with spears and shields: upon their board
Great silver tankards brimmed with mead: for each
A fair Valkyrie stood in readiness
To fetch delicious viands, or refill
The drinking-bowl, oft emptied. Here were thronged
Victors in bloody combats on the land,
And vikings who had won renown at sea,
Battling with storms. To please them came the
 skalds,
Who sang them songs of love and warfare, while
The cymbals clashed, and sounds of harps and horns
Blended in deep-toned harmonies. But oft
The warriors with their own bass voices raised
Hilarious drinking-songs, that were half drowned
In loud, uproarious laughter from the rest.
With florid cheeks, with quivering golden beards,
With blue eyes blurred from wine, shaking with mirth,
The heroes drank tumultuous healths, or clasped
And kissed the winsome handmaids that they loved.

At Bifrost, bridge of rainbow, stands alert
Heimdall, warder of Asgard. His keen eyes
Pierce through the midnight for an hundred leagues:
His watchful ears can hear the blades of grass
Growing within the fields, and hear the wool
Growing upon the sheep's back. In his hand
Is Gjallarhorn, the awful trump of doom,
Whose blast shall one day summon gods and men
To face death on the last of battlefields,

Announcing in dread pealing the approach
Of Ragnarok, the Twilight of the Gods,
When the great monsters from the deep escape
To fight with heaven; when frightful darkness comes;
When earth and sea and sky enwrap in flames,
And deities and men alike behold
Their ending, and the end of all the world.

"Turn now," said Codro, "to the nether realm,
That pit of darkness where the fiends are chained,
And where the pallid spectres glimmer by,
Shivering and sighing. In that land accurst
See Balder, the White God, the beautiful youth,
The son of Odin and of Frea, slain
By the small treacherous twig of mistletoe
Flung by the blind god Hoder, at the hest
Of Loki, prince of demons. In those haunts
Of dolor, in those tomblands waste and wild,
Deserts of everlasting night, of grief,
Terror and blasphemy, see his lovely face,
So pure, so lucent, that it radiates
A white light through the unholy gloom! Behold
His smooth pale boyish cheeks, his golden hair:
O, what a trophy for victorious Death!"

Now the scene changed. The world-tree, Igdrasil,
Quaked from the gnawing tooth of Nithogg: lo!
The monsters of the great deep felt their gyves
Severed asunder, and in armed hosts
Went forth to war with heaven. Ferocious Garm,
Hell's monstrous watch-dog, broke his iron bonds,
And starting heavenward with the rended chain
Rattling about him, every ear appalled
With furious baying. Quickly Heimdall blew

On Gjallarhorn: its thrilling peals aroused
The creatures of all worlds to the dread hour
Of Ragnarok, the Twilight of the Gods,
The day of wrath for deities and men.

Loki, chained to a rock, where serpents dripped
Virus upon his head, with a great wrench
Snapt his strong fetters, and called his demon rout
To follow. Then his horrid progeny,
The misbegotten Trinity of Hell
That Angerbode, the Frostland giantess,
Spawned to him in the ancient years, broke forth,
Fierce for the conflict. Dreadful Hela came,
The goddess of the dead, with haggard cheeks,
With livid lips and brows, and yet with eyes
Glowing like coals of fire: Fenris, the wolf,
Shaggy and gray, whose stature reached the stars:
Lastly, the Midgard Serpent, whose vast coils
Circled the seas and continents of earth,
And convoluting upward, fold on fold,
Like a black deluge blotted out the sky.

Appalling darkness gathered; thunders crashed,
And lightnings cleaved the skies; from the great deep
The monsters bellowed, as they took their way
To golden Asgard. Now was heard the rush
Of deities to arms: the clang of swords,
Clanking of shields, and hollow-sounding din
Of armor seized and donned in haste, were heard
In great Valhalla's spear-hung halls. Now Garm,
Hell's hound, with fierce green eyes, and rabid jaws
Dripping green venom, in carnivorous rage
Howling, leaped Asgard's walls. The war-god, Tyr,
Transfixed him with his lance, but in the act

Himself was torn to pieces by the brute.
Fenris, the wolf gigantic, whose vast bulk
Expunged the sun, snapping and snarling, reared
Maddened for prey, and slew the sire of gods,
Yea, even almighty Odin, king of heaven,
With one great sweep of his tremendous paw.
But fleeting was his triumph: for the sword
Of Vithar, Son of Odin, cleaved his heart
In furious vengeance.

Through his leagues of coils
The Midgard Serpent shuddered, for the bolts
Of Thor had rent his vitals; but ere long
His victor was his victim, for his fangs,
Deadly with poison, darted sting on sting
Into the bosom of the son of heaven.
Then the God reeled: down fell his doughty arm,
Dropping its iron hammer: pallid grew
His warlike countenance: and so he fell
Thundering, as falls some lofty promontory
Into a raging sea. Divinities
And fiends alike, trembled to see him lie
Dead with his horrid prey.

Spouting red flames
From red dragonian jaws, the fire-fiend, Surt,
Breathed upon Freya, mother of the gods;
Swooning in that sirocco, she recoiled,
Shriveled, and turned to ashes. When at last
Loki and Heimdall, facing, stood alone
On the charred fields of heaven, where all the rest,
Both gods and fiends, lay perished, each prepared
For the last duel. Not one word was breathed.
Grim was the face of Heimdall: Loki stood

Beautiful, though evil: his black snaky eyes
Glittered; upon his dusky countenance,
Like a wan moondawn in a gloomy night,
Shone joy malignant. For he knew, though fate
Had doomed him, yet the gods that doom would share.
So now each champion, bending backward, poised
His forceful arm to cast the spear: each flung
At the same instant his redoubted steel.
Each pierced the other's heart, and in one breath
The heavenly warder and Hell's king lay dead.
Now earth in ocean sank: in one vast blaze
Crackled the skies, and Asgard's golden halls
Crumbled to ruins. Heaven and earth were gone,
Gods, fiends and men. Only a blackened waste
Recalled the wondrous universe of yore.

But lo! after a time, from out the gulf
Of darkness, gentle Balder rose again,
More splendent than before: immortal youth
In his cheeks glowed: with cloudless joy his eyes
Sparkled. From out of Nature's funeral pyre
A sweet young pair he led, who in the years
Yet coming would replenish earth again,
But with a race more noble.

Through the gloom
That now was fast dispersing, came a voice,
A vast, deep utterance, as though all the gods
Of all the lands, that in this dream had passed
Before the mortal, since from heavenly scenes
He had descended, spake in one strong tongue,
Saying: "Farewell! the fables we have told
Are not all truthless; for they symbolize
The trend of man's existence. Heed them well.

*We are the spirits of departed gods,
Whose use on earth is ended. Now we go
Unto our dark necropolis forever.
But dream not that the true Divinity
Is ended when our little days expire:
For God, The One, The Eternal God, lives on,
Though countless gods and goddesses may die."*

Now spake the guide: "Look forth and view the
world,
The fair regenerated world to be
When man his destiny achieves." They looked,
And lo! the legions of humanity
Stood free of earthy soilure, purged of all
Earth's grossness. Strife no more in hearts of men
Aroused the beast: the only Force was Love.
White as the dream of poet, saint or sage,
Were all the annals of the new-born race.
There were no Chosen People, for all men
Were brothers, and all men were sons of God,
Enjoying equal favors at His hands.
Earth was emparadised: bees free of stings
Sucked honeyed sweets from roses free of thorns:
The brilliant tropic birds, once dumb, now sang,
And norland birds, once gray, wore gorgeous plumes.
Angels came down to walk with men, and men
Upsoared to walk with angels. Earth arose
To neighborhood with heaven, and heaven de-
scended
With earth to hold communion, till the twain
Were blended. Like a dewy star of morn,
Dissolving in the pure white light of day,
The soul of man unto its source returned,
And melted in the bosom of its God.

"All shall be saved," the guide resumed, "for Hell,
That hideous nightmare born of hellish minds,
Is but remorse for evil done on earth,
A penalty that upon this selfsame earth,
And in this selfsame life, all men must pay.
Search thine own conscience! Thou hast paid the
price

In tears and groans for every savage wretch
Enslaved or slain at thy behest. But man,
Not God, the guilty soul would still pursue
Through worlds to come, with agonies infinite
Avenging finite wrongs. Be thou assured
The brave Peruvian nobleman spake truth:
*'No man a hell deserves save he whose hate
Conceives it, and reserves it for his foes.'*"

Then spake De Soto: "I am dying; yet
A little longer would I live, to teach
To all mankind the lessons I have learned
From thee, O comrade, in this vision." "Nay,"
Returned the sage: "the time is not yet ripe:
Men would not understand thee. Centuries
Must pass before these children of the dust
Are fitted to receive the truths which thou
This night hast learned. Unto Alonzo's ear,
And his alone, mayest thou relate this dream.
For he is young, with a mind yet undulled
By custom or convention of the past.
In him is typified the race to come.
By slow degrees hereafter, through his seed,
These lessons may be spread afar,—not now.
Until that day, old teachings must suffice.
And it is best. Thou in thy blundering way
Hast in the past years served thy fellow-man

Better than thou hadst done hadst thou known
more.

Oft Ignorance best can cope with Ignorance,
Achieving more than Wisdom: oft the blind
Can better teach the blind than those who see.
Progress must wait its own due season, else
Like verdure ere the springtime born, it wilts
In the late frosts of winter. And Reform
Must wait its own appointed hour for birth,
Or like a babe torn from its mother's womb
Untimely, it is brought forth dead, or comes
Deformed, to hobble impotent for good
Unto the world it might have saved.

“When Life

Was first breathed into clay, God stood aloof
In silence, purposely, that man might win
The conflict for himself, and in the attempt
Gain strength and force and patience. As the eagle
Thrusts out the timid eaglet from the nest
High on the dizzy crag, making him fly
To save himself by his own quaking wings
From the wild gulf that greedily yawns below:—
And as the waterfowl casts its young chick
Into the sea, to make it mount the waves
With its own trembling feet and shivering breast:—
So God hath cast man out to save himself
From hostile elements, and thus be taught
The godlike virtue, self-reliance. Yea,
That godlike virtue! *For of all men, he
Is most like God who most on self relies.*
And so, De Soto, men must learn from thee
Thy dogged perseverance, and from thee
Must copy patience in adversity,—

Forever striving onward, inch by inch,
Though oft defeated, oft by fools condemned.

"In me is typified the human soul,—
Awkward, ungainly, homely, yet in time
Transfigured from its olden earthly form
To tread the empyrean glorified.
As thou thyself hast spoken, now I say:—
*'As flows the Guadiana underground,
Leaving bright skies, and groping through the night,
Only to rise and greet the day once more,
So shall the spirit sink to Stygian glooms,
To rise in noonday splendor greater still.'*"

BOOK XXVIII

De Soto tells Alonzo of his vision—Later, he dies—His character measured by his friends—He is buried near the camp, but the place of his grave is kept secret, the savages being told that he is still living—But the Indians are not deceived—One of their chiefs brings two young men as a human sacrifice for his tomb—Moscoso releases the captive youths—The Spaniards then determine to bury De Soto in the Great River—The burial in the Mississippi—The Spaniards march to the west, where Vasconcelos dies—His lonely grave—After wandering through the forests, the band returns to the Mississippi, where brigantines are built to convey the survivors to Mexico—Abandoning the slaves—The Indians pursue the Spaniards down the stream—The slaughter of the steeds—The passage of the mouth of the Mississippi and the return to Mexico by sea—Alonzo, Lulla, and their babe arrive safely—Isabel's long waiting—Her last song—Her death—De Soto's grave.

MORN came: then waking, to his couch of death
De Soto called Alonzo. There he told
Unto his youthful kinsman all his dream,
Even as the reader finds it written here.
And then De Soto added: "By this dream,
Alonzo, am I comforted in death:
I die unmurmuring. Keep its precepts well,
And it may aid thee likewise. In the days
That yet await thee, unto other ears
Thou mayest reveal it, so the seeds of truth
It brings thee may not perish from the world.
And yet beware of babbling it to those

Unworthy to receive it; for but few
May scan the sun of truth with flinchless eyes,
And most may only view its radiant light
When veiled in clouds of error. And remember,
Regarding this same dream, and all thy gifts
To others in this life: *Give but to him,
Him only, who is fitted to receive.*"
His lips grew silent, and he closed his eyes:
His power of speech expired: his breathing ceased:
His labors and his conflicts all were over.¹⁰⁷

That night his friends kept vigil by his corse,
Each yielding tribute to his memory.
"His days were troubled," said Moscoso; "yet
The greatest life flows not in quietude.
For tame and unpoetic is that stream
Which glides forever in a smooth career.
The rock-bound river, broken by waterfalls,
Tortured to foaming torrents, and convolved
In whirlpools and in eddies, yet is the haunt
Of song and story: wildly beautiful,
Amidst a fairyland it leaps and bounds,
With dark romantic forests, lofty heights,
And rainbows reared on cataracts sublime."
"His faults were many," said Anasco; "still,
Faults not too great may prove an added charm.
So was it here; for oft his blemishes
Traced lines unique and pleasing, like the veins
In marble, or the frecklings on a flower."
"Rash was he often," said Vasconcelos,
"And quick of temper; harsh at times, and stern,
But generous and forgiving. Charged with zeal,
His tropic nature felt the earthquake-thrill,
The cyclone, and the hot volcanic flame

Of passion; but the ample continent
Of his great soul knew not the Arctic snows
That freeze all warmer instincts in the hearts
Of some more blameless in the sight of men."

Gallegos and Alonzo sought the woods,
To hew their leader's coffin. Not afar
They found a giant oak-tree. Centuries old,
That gray forefather of the wilderness,
Still hale and hearty, lifted unto heaven
Boughs that were landmarks many leagues away.
"This tree it is," they said, "for such a man;
The heart of oak should hold the heart of oak:
Let its great bosom be his resting-place."
So, under their axes, ere the noontide flamed,
The ancient monarch thundered to the ground.

They shrouded not the knight; his martial form
They sheathed in armor; in his pulseless hands
His good sword lay at rest; over his heart
They laid the Cross of Christ. So thus it was,
The weighty casket, cleaved from heart of oak,
Received him as its guest till Judgment Day.

But now the crafty natives, having marked
The leader stretched in illness, missed his face,
And asked, "Where is your chieftain? Let us see
him."

Moscoso answered, "He hath journeyed hence,
But only for a short while: he returns
Before the corn-moon's wane." This he avowed
With secret purpose, for the foresters
Had deemed the knight immortal: should they learn
That death had claimed him as a child of dust,

One fragile as themselves, Moscoso knew
Their awe would lessen, and the little band
Of Christians soon might be assailed. A grave
Beside the camp was digged, and there was laid
The casket with its body. Not a stone
Was reared to mark the grave, for his men feared
That this would but attract barbaric eyes
Unto the hallowed spot. Smoothing the earth,
They strewed above it heaps of withered leaves.
But the deep secret to make deeper still,
Above the place his followers played their games;
They laughed, they romped, they rode their very
steeds
Over the sacred earth, though in their hearts,
Treading his dust they felt a cruel pang.

But still the keen-eyed paynims guessed the truth.
Their chief came, leading two fine lads, their wrists
And ankles bound with cords. Naked they stood,
With proud necks lifting princely heads on high
Over symmetric shoulders, and with arms
Rounded, yet firm: sturdy their legs, and strong,
And curved in manly grace: their shapely feet
With graceful instep arches seemed to spurn
The earth's caress. More splendid were the twain
Than two young leopards: he who scanned them well
Surely would know them fleeter at the chase
Than grayhound in pursuit or stag pursued.

The chieftain said, "Deny me not. I know
Your leader lies in death. I bring with me,
As is the ancient custom of our race,
Two goodly young men for a sacrifice
Upon the tomb of him, the Child of Heaven."

Though the brave youths deigned not to beg for life,
Their liquid pleading eyes upturned as though
In supplication mute, while quivering fires
Shone in the darkness of those dewy orbs
Like stars in waters rippling through the night.
Moscoso took the young men, saying, "True;
Our chieftain is no more. But now depart,
I pray thee: I must counsel with my knights
Over these matters." When the chief had gone,
Moscoso freed the captives. Then they fell
Before his feet and eagerly kissed his hands.

But now Anasco sought the leader, saying,
"I fear our captain's grave is known; and so
Fell hands his precious dust may violate.
To the Great River he revealed to men,
Let us remove him for his last long sleep."
This counsel of Anasco all the rest
Approving, from the dust his corse they raised,
Preparing, for all time unborn, to make
The River his majestic sepulchre.

The midnight comes, and at that solemn hour
They bear him to the boat,—a burden great,
For massive is the oak, and the knight sleeps
In knightly armor. Plying swift the oars,
Where nineteen fathom deep roll heavy waves,
Their shallop stays its course. They pause, and then
The priests raise fervent prayers above the dead,
While weird responses of wild whippoorwills
Rise plaintive from the tangled wilderness.

"De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine:

Domine, exaudi vocem meam!"

Hark, how the night winds rustle through the trees!

Hark, how the waters ripple through the oars!
"Kyrie Eleison!" now implores the priest,
"Kyrie Eleison!" echoes from the woods.
Lo! comes a sudden splash, a gurgling sound,
And then the Mississippi's mighty arms
Close round the oak-bound, armored knight forever.

When the sun rose next day, their chieftain gone,
Toward the future every heart was turned,
Asking, "What waits us now? On what strange paths
Shall our feet rove in this vast wilderness?"
Moscoso had been choice of all, since all
Believed him but a votary of ease,
Loving repose unvexed by savage cries,
Or howls of wild beasts; led by one like him,
They little doubted that their band would turn
From this barbaric desert, and escape
To realms more gracious. So in time it proved.

But first they wandered to the west afar,
In the vast trackless forests, as of yore,
Enduring endless hardships. Here it was,
The noble Portuguese, Vasconcelos,
Died, and was buried. In those gloomy woods,
Unmarked was left his solitary grave.
And there amid that solemn wilderness,
The wild blackberry's wreath of snowy blooms
Scatters alone its tribute on his tomb.
In summer shades at morn the wild bird calls,
At noon the drowsy locust chirps and hums,
And through the night the lonesome katydid,
Sleepless and restless, makes her plaint. And there,
Left to oblivion, far from old compeers,
Far from his home of youth in mountain heights,

That guard the ancient Portugal he loved,
Far from the vineyards and the olive groves
Where strayed his boyish feet in vanished years,
Far from the Tagus and its pastoral fields,
And far from friendly Lusitanian skies,
Vasconcelos, forsaken, sleeps alone.

Retreating from these western wilds, at last
To the Great River they returned, and there
Slowly they built a fleet of brigantines,
Whereby they hoped to reach again the shores
Of friendly Mexico. But scarcely half
Of those brave Christians who at first had marched
In high hopes with De Soto's knightly band
Unto this desolate region, now survived
In this flotilla to embark for home.

When they returned, a score of slaves they took,
But all the rest, five hundred wretched souls,
They left behind. Then the poor slaves that thus
Their masters had marooned, with piteous tears
Begged to be taken likewise, crying out,
"Masters, we speak your speech, we own your faith,
Unto your God we pray, and through your Christ
We seek salvation. We have served you well,
And still we long to serve you all through life.
O, leave us not, as victims for the jaws
Of wolves and panthers, or more dreadful still,
To die the death of traitors at the hands
Of our own kin, who hate us for your sake!
O, take us, take us, Masters! Leave us not!"

Ah, hapless fate! To leave those Christians thus,
Those poor benighted followers of the Cross,

Alone and helpless in that wilderness,
Naked to storms of heaven, defenseless prey
For tusks of wild beasts, trembling marks for wrath
In hands of cruel heathen—O, what grace
Could yield forgiveness to such frightful sin?
And there were women thus forsook, who loved
Their cruel masters, and though loved themselves,
Would now be left behind forever. These,
Frantic with grief when came the parting hour,
Uplifted unto God their mad appeals:
And there rose lamentations, wild farewells,
Heart-breaking sobs and supplicating cries,
Such as, if heard, must have brought tears to eyes
Of Seraphs never known to weep before
Amid their bliss in Paradise afar.

As though in retribution, down the stream
Fierce Indians with an hundred swift canoes
Pursued the Spaniards three whole days and nights.
So, many Christians perished by the shafts
Hissing in fury from the practiced hands
Of archers in the rear; but fivefold more
Were wounded grievously. On the fourth day
The crafty red men feigned retreat: they lagged
In their pursuit, falling behind: ere long
Their fleet had disappeared. But this they did
To lull their prey to carelessness. For soon
The cavaliers, believing that the chase
Was over, and their dangers at an end,
Dropped anchor in a cove, mounted their steeds,
And hunting game, roved the surrounding woods,
Incautious. After wandering until noon,
Returning, they had barely time enow
To flee for life; for as they came, they saw

The fierce barbarians in their serried fleet
Rounding the river's bend in hot pursuit.

Thus they were forced to leave their steeds behind,
Victims to cruel enemies. Alas!
Too soon the furious Indians marked their prey
The poor dumb brutes by instinct knew at once
Their end had come: they galloped round and round,
Encompassed by that fierce barbaric horde,
Tossing their heads in terror, neighing aloud,
Snorting, and rearing, and plunging frenziedly.
Dart after dart the savage bowmen sped;
Steed after steed fell quivering to the sod.
The Christians longed to save them, but in vain;
No strength, no skill, could rescue, or avenge.
As fathers weep to see their children die,
So wept their owners. Through a thousand leagues
Of mountain, river, lake and wilderness,
Master and horse had ridden in the past.
In bale and bliss companions, peace and war,
Enduring shocks of battles, storms of heaven,
Encountering summer heat and winter snow,
Starvation, plenty, victory and defeat,
How could they bear to separate at last?
Ah, never more to canter over hill,
Or gallop through the undulating field!
Ah, never with them would they breast again
The woodland pool, and never, never more
In flowerful meadows would they give them rein,
To browse at pleasure, as in bygone years!

The roan, the sorrel and the frosted gray
Sank one by one beneath the savage darts.
The last, a grand Arabian, dazzling white—

Careering with his neck's imperial arch
Curved like a milk-white peacock's sumptuous crest—
Whose mane gleamed spotless in the morning sun,
Streaming a snowy banner to the winds—
Still neighing, sought to reach the river-bank,
And join his masters floating down the stream.
But cruel shaft on shaft besieged his heart;
Blood gushed along his creamy flanks and breast;
The snowy banner of his mane turned red.
Faintly he whinnied at his old-time friends
Speeding adown the river far away,
Then fell convulsive, with a strange, wild scream.
So died the last of all the noble steeds
De Soto brought from far-off hills of Spain.

At last the river reached the Southern gulf.
A vast flat stretch of sand its delta lay,
Dreary and sterile. Grouped in lonely throngs,
Like patriarchs with long majestic beards
Sweeping their robes pontifical, arose
Gray water-oaks with drooping hoary moss.
Some gloomy willows hung despondingly:
Slim reeds and rushes in the vagrant winds
Rustled and sighed; above them, stiff and sharp,
Bristling palmetto lances pierced the sky.

There trod the pelicans and soared the cranes,
And there great multitudes of waterfowl
Of every kind, named and unnamed of men,
Fashioned their nests of mud. And there it was,
From three great arms and networks of lagoons
Encroaching on the waters to the south,—
Choking the gulf with sand-peninsulas
And desert isles of shifting sediment,—

After long wandering through uncounted leagues,
The mighty river met the mighty sea.

Southward and westward for four weary moons
Along that lone barbaric coast they sailed,
Encountering plagues and pests innumerable,
Enduring thirst and hunger, heat and cold,
Drenched in the rains, and tossed before the storms.
After four years,—years unforgettable!—
Had passed since first the prideful band had sailed
With brave De Soto, bound for wilds unknown,
Their long, long highway reached a goal. For now,
Their hoarse throats lifted up a maddened shout,
And their dull eyes uplit with maniac joy,
When far away,—dim as lost dreams of youth,
Yet real and substantial as a friend
Lending a sturdy hand to weak old age,—
The haven of their fond hopes they descried,—
The ten-times welcome shores of Mexico.

Alonzo, Lulla, and their babe, were safe
Among the rest. But grievous was the plight
Of cavaliers once gay as morning stars.
Half had been lost, to gladden nevermore
At sight of friends or homes. Those crawling back,
A tattered remnant of the gallant host,
Wild-eyed and hairy, brutalized and fierce,
With haggard visages, with sunburnt limbs,
Had semblance more of jackals than of men.
The first white men who saw them coming, fled
In terror: others turned to seize their arms.
But soon they told their story. Long before,
Their countrymen had deemed them lost: so now,
Seeing the waifs returned, the dead revived,

Rejoicing, they embraced them; lavishly
The exiles' piteous wants their hands relieved.

Through all these joyless years had Isabel
Been ever waiting for her absent lord.
And as a lovelorn little damosel
Waits by the fireside at her cottage home
To hear the footstep of some neighbor's lad,
Her favored youngster, but awaits in vain
His coming at the wonted hour, and mopes
In silence, though her mother and her sire
Accost her, and her little brothers call,
And sisters tease her, as she sits aloof,
Unheedful of them,—so did Isabel
Linger unheedful of the multitude
That hummed and buzzed around her day by day.
From her lone stilly bower she often gazed
In silence over the melancholy sea,
To sight his bark returning. Sun or storm,
Splendor or shadow, ruled the vasty waves,
And still she watched in vain. Fierce hurricanes
Would roll the billows into mountains. Calms
Would smooth the heated waters as with oil.
Like children tracing figures on the sands,
Zephyrs in play wrought figures on the waves.
But never would her eyes upon that waste
Behold his homeward-steering prows. At times
Some one would eagerly cry, "A sail! A sail!"
Making her breast heave and her eye grow bright,
Hoping that now her knight was wending home.
But disappointment followed still. Again,
At twilight she would watch the homing gulls,
And trembling with emotion, clasp her harp,
Making it lend her weary soul a voice:

"One face, and one alone, I long to see.

Ten thousand others pass me on my way;
Ten thousand others! Yet I yearn for thee,
And yearning for thee, pine the livelong day.

"The nesting thrush hath settled on her nest;

The raven through the twilight seeks his home;
But, banished from thy side, with aching breast
I sit forsaken in the gathering gloam.

"Sweet from its belfry peals the angelus;

The pallid moon climbs yonder eastern tree;
Night folds around me, softly piteous.
One face, and one alone, I long to see.

"The laborer ceases labor; at his cot

His wife awaits him with her little brood:
Ah, humble swain, how happy seems thy lot,
Viewed from mine empty void of solitude!

"Oh, weight of utter, utter loneliness,

Amidst a multitude, yet barred from thee!
Without thee, all the world is wilderness.
One face, and one alone, I long to see."

The ships she sent to bear the lost one aid,
Long moons had waited for him in that port
Appointed as their meeting-place: no word
The barks, returning, brought her eager ears.
So, when there came the tidings, long-delayed,
She fell ill. None could tell her malady,
And none could stay its progress. For three days
She lingered on in silence, answering not
The calls of those around her. So she died.

De Soto sleeps beneath his River's waves;
No prouder, no more lasting monument
Hath any being of terrestrial birth.
The dying Theban, ¹⁰⁸ crowned with victory,
For mausoleum had his battle-field,
And childless, yet exclaimed exultingly,
"Two fairest daughters leave I unto Thebes—
Leuctra and Mantinea, deathless names!"
The giant Alps, where sleep eternal snows,
Where rush wild tempests everlastingly,
Where raging torrents leap, where eagles soar,
And rocky summits blend with clouds of heaven—
These make a tomb for Winkelried and Tell,
Stout-hearted patriots of their mountain land.
Magellan—he who sought to round the world—
Who gave his life to prove the earth a globe—
The stormy ocean shouts his glorious deeds,
Spreading his fame from tropics to the pole.
De Soto's mighty River, leading on
Ten thousand tributaries to the sea—
A tomb as lordly as a demigod's,
Magnificent and everlasting—bears
From Norland snow-peaks' fountain-urns of ice
To the far sunland vales of plummy palms,
The name of him who gave it to the world.

NOTES

In the orthography of Spanish and Indian proper names I have generally followed the most popular English usage, though at times that usage may not, rigidly speaking, according to the rules of the original tongues themselves, be the most correct. I am aware, I hardly need say, that without the use of his baptismal name De Soto is more properly referred to simply as Soto. But the name "De Soto" has become so firmly fixed in our literature and history that it would be presumptuous to attempt a change.

x

Here in the country of the Chickasaws
De Soto lingered.

This was in North Mississippi, near the chief town of the tribe, where De Soto and his men were encamped from December 17, 1540, to March 15, 1541.

Claiborne in his *History of Mississippi* says that De Soto entered the State near the present site of the town of Columbus. He locates the village of Chickasaw on the Pontotoc Ridge, about two miles southeast of the present town of Pontotoc. Theodore Irving conjectures that "this village probably stood on the western bank of the Yazoo, a branch of the Mississippi, about eighty leagues to the northwest of Mobile." Wilmer in his life of De Soto, places it in the Yalobusha valley.

Mr. W. A. Belk, of Holly Springs, Mississippi, writes me, however, that the fortified camp of De Soto was situated about three or four miles northwest of the town of Tupelo. He says that he has visited the place, and found numerous proofs of the correctness of his theory. He further says that the camp was situated on the crest of an elevated tract, and covered about

twenty acres. He plainly saw marks of breastworks, and on digging into the soil, many relics were discovered. Among these were human bones, a tomahawk, an old flint-lock pistol, Indian war-paint, beads, silver spurs and epaulets. The camp of De Soto was not far from the Indian village.

I am inclined to think that Mr. Belk is right, and that the camp and town were near Tupelo.

2

"Never have I known

A winter half so bleak."

Although the winters of North Mississippi are usually mild, there was a heavy snow-storm, beginning shortly before Christmas, 1540, which continued a long time, followed by such a rigorously cold season as called forth much comment among the Indians. The Spanish soldiers complained greatly of the inclemency of this winter.

3

A noisy herd of swine.

This herd of swine constitutes a unique aspect of the expedition. It was driven by the Spaniards on their march during four years, traversing a route through nine or ten States, over two thousand miles. The animals seem to have multiplied astoundingly on the way, for although the Portuguese Gentleman says that the herd was a "small" one at the beginning, we are told that four hundred were lost at Maubila, and about three hundred more were afterwards killed in the sacking of the Spanish camp at Chickasaw.

4

Moscoso next in rank and prestige came.

Luys Moscoso de Alvarado, a companion of De Soto and Pizarro in the conquest of Peru, and afterwards De Soto's successor as leader of the North American expedition.

5

The sage

In measured accents gave the narrative

Through Chickasaw traditions handed down.

The history of the Chickasaw nation here given I have derived principally from Claiborne's *History of Mississippi*.

In 1842-3, J. F. H. Claiborne, author of this history, "presided over a board of Commissioners established by the United States to enquire into and adjudicate the claims of the Choctaws growing out of the last treaty made with them prior to their removal west,

and for months at a time a thousand Indians were assembled around the Commission. The examination took a wide range, and having skilled interpreters, the opportunity was used to elicit much curious information," which is embodied in the history. Page 483.

Claiborne proceeds to say: "The late Gen. Simon Dale, of Lauderdale County, Mississippi, who lived to an advanced age, had passed many years of his life among the southern Indians. He spoke the Cherokee, Muscogee and Choctaw tongues, and was familiar with all their traditions and customs. And from conversations with him, reduced at the time to writing, this account is chiefly derived." *Ibid.*

As to the origin of all the Indian tribes in Peru and Mexico, we are invariably assured by their traditions that they came from the north. All the tribes in the Southern States came from the west. The Asiatic origin of all the American Indians is nearly certain.

6

The longest of all earthly rivers, called
The Mississippi: that name signifies
"Father of Waters" in our native speech.

This is the popular acceptance of the meaning of the word, but there is some dispute about it, and some uncertainty as to the name given to the river by the Chickasaws of De Soto's time. Those Indians living upon the river itself called it the Chucagua. Possibly the name "Chicago" was derived from this, though that is doubtful. There is similar obscurity as to the origin of the names Tennessee, Ohio and Tombigbee, but they are all aboriginal terms.

As to the boundaries of the Chickasaw Nation four hundred years ago, I have given them in accordance with accounts which seem to me most reliable. But like other kingdoms, that of the Chickasaws waxed or waned in territory from time to time.

7

The region where they ceased their onward march
The tribes named "Alabama."

This is the generally accepted belief as to the origin of that name. But there was a fortress or barricade between the Chickasaw village and the Mississippi River, afterwards stormed and taken by De Soto, which, according to the Portuguese Gentleman, was called "Alibamo."

8 The greatest was a brute of fearful shape.

This tradition, firmly fixed among the Chickasaws, probably referred to the mammoth, a monster contemporaneous with primeval man.

9 And Ortiz then his narrative began.

The remarkable story of Juan Ortiz is told by all the old chroniclers, and with surprising unanimity as to details. The disagreements among them are only trivial. Ucita in Garcilaso's account is called Hirrihigua: but this latter name was that of the province. The Spaniards often thus confounded the name of the province with that of its chief.

10 The Moon of Green Corn glimmers first to-night;
Not till the Bear Moon falls that festival.

The Indians had various names for the months. For instance, June was often known as the Flower Moon, and December as the Snow Moon. But among different tribes different titles were given.

"Almost every month had its peculiar feast or festival. Among the Natchez the year began with our month of March, and was divided into thirteen moons. With each new moon a feast was celebrated, receiving its name from the principal fruits gathered or animals hunted. Thus, the first moon was called the *Deer* moon and was observed with universal joy as the commencement of the year. This was followed by the festival of *Strawberries*. The third moon ushered in the *Small Corn*, and was impatiently expected because the crop of large corn seldom lasted from one harvest to another.

"The *Water-Melon* feast occurred during the fourth moon, answering to our month of June.

"The fifth moon was that of the *Fishes*. At this time grapes were gathered.

"The sixth was known as the *Mulberry* moon. The *Maize* or *Great-Corn* moon succeeded, and was rendered remarkable by the most noted festival of the year. The *Turkey* moon answered to our October, while the ninth and tenth moons were known respectively as the *Buffalo* and *Bear* moons. It was then those animals were hunted. The eleventh month was called the *Cold-Meal* moon; the twelfth, the *Chestnut* moon; and the thirteenth the *walnut* moon." Jones' *Antiquities of the Southern Indians*, pp. 99-100.

11

From dismal tarns fierce alligators roared.

In those early days, all the rivers and lakes and marshes of the South swarmed with these creatures.

William Bartram in 1773 and succeeding years traveled extensively through the great wilderness that then covered the Southern States. In his *Travels*, he says (pp. 123 to 127):

"As I passed by Battle lagoon, I began to tremble and keep a good look out; when suddenly a huge alligator rushed out of the weeds, and with a tremendous roar came up, and darted as swift as an arrow under my boat, emerging upright on my lee quarter, with open jaws, and belching water and smoke that fell upon me like rain in a hurricane. I laid soundly about his head with my club and beat him off; and after plunging and darting about my boat, he went off on a straight line through the water, seemingly with the rapidity of lightning, and entered the cape of the lagoon. I now employed my time to the very best advantage in paddling close along shore, but could not forbear looking now and then behind me, and presently perceived one of them coming up again. The water of the river hereabouts was shoal and very clear; the monster came up with the usual roar and menaces, and passed close by the side of my boat, when I could distinctly see a young brood of alligators, to the number of one hundred or more, following after her in a long train. They kept close together in a column without straggling off to the one side or the other; the young appeared to be of an equal size, about fifteen inches in length, almost black, with pale yellow transverse waved clouds or blotches, much like rattlesnakes in color. I now lost sight of my enemy again.

"Still keeping close along shore, on turning a point or projection of the river bank, at once I beheld a great number of hillocks or small pyramids, resembling hay-cocks, ranged like an encampment along the banks. They stood fifteen or twenty yards distant from the water, on a high marsh, about four feet perpendicular above the water. I knew them to be the nests of the crocodile, having had a description of them before, and now expected a furious and general attack, as I saw several large crocodiles swimming abreast of these buildings. These nests being so great a curiosity to me, I was determined at all events immediately to land and examine them. Accordingly, I ran my bark on shore at one of their landing-places, which was a sort of nick or little dock, from which ascended a sloping path or road

up to the edge of the meadow, where their nests were; most of them were deserted, and the great thick whitish eggshells lay broken and scattered upon the ground round about them.

"The nests or hillocks are of the form of an obtuse cone, four feet high, and four or five feet in diameter at their bases; they are constructed with mud, grass and herbage. At first they lay a floor of this kind of tempered mortar on the ground, upon which they deposit a layer of eggs, and upon this a stratum of mortar seven or eight inches in thickness, and then another layer of eggs, and in this manner one stratum upon another, nearly to the top. I believe they commonly lay from one to two hundred eggs in a nest: these are hatched, I suppose, by the heat of the sun; and perhaps the vegetable substances mixed with the earth, being acted upon by the sun, may cause a small degree of fermentation, and so increase the heat in those hillocks. The ground for several acres about these nests showed evident marks of a continual resort of alligators; the grass was everywhere beaten down, hardly a blade or straw was left standing; whereas, all about, at a distance, it was five or six feet high, and as thick as it could grow together. The female, as I imagine, carefully watches her own nest of eggs until they are all hatched; or perhaps while she is attending her own brood, she takes under her care and protection as many as she can get at one time, either from her own particular nest or others: but certain it is, that the young are not left to shift for themselves; for I have had frequent opportunities of seeing the female alligator leading about the shores her train of young ones, just as a hen does her brood of chickens; and she is equally assiduous and courageous in defending the young, which are under her care, and providing for their subsistence; and when she is basking upon the warm banks, with her brood around her, you may hear the young ones continually whining and barking, like young puppies. I believe but few of a brood live to the years of full growth and magnitude, as the old feed on the young as long as they can make prey of them.

* * * * *

"But what is yet more surprising to a stranger, is the incredible loud and terrifying roar, which they are capable of making, especially in the spring season, their breeding time. It most resembles very heavy distant thunder, not only shaking the air and waters, but causing the earth to tremble; and when hundreds

and thousands are roaring at the same time, you can scarcely be persuaded but that the whole globe is violently and dangerously agitated."

12

A turkey-cock began his morning calls.

"They begin at early dawn, and continue till sunrise, from March till the last of April. The high forests ring with the noise, like the crowing of the domestic cock, of these social sentinels; the watch-word being caught and repeated, from one to another, for hundreds of miles around, insomuch that the whole country is for an hour or more in an universal shout." Bartram's *Travels*, pp. 81-82.

13

At Xeres I was born.

This was Xeres (or Jerez) de los Caballeros, in the province of Estremadura, and not the more important town of Xeres de la Frontera, in Southern Spain. The year was probably 1500, though some suppose it to be 1501. Garcilaso and Herrera fix De Soto's birthplace at Villa Nueva de Barcarota. Still other historians give the distinction to Badajoz. I have accepted the statement of the Portuguese narrator on this point, as he was not only a personal acquaintance of De Soto, but was himself a resident of a neighboring town, and must have had the best information.

The Gaudiana river, here referred to as flowing near De Soto's birthplace, at one point in its course sinks into the earth, and runs underground for a long distance before reappearing.

14

Pedrarias was the one of whom I speak.

Don Pedro Arias de Avila, commonly known as Pedrarias, one of the earliest Spanish Governors of Darien, and founder of the present city of Panama.

15

So then Balboa had a barrel made.

This unique experience of Balboa in escaping from his creditors is well authenticated.

16

Conversing with him and his wife.

She had accompanied her husband on his first voyage.

"Don Pedrarias had intended to leave his wife in Spain. Her name was Doña Isabella de Bobadilla; she was niece to the Marchioness de Moya, a great favorite of the late Queen Isabella.

who had been instrumental in persuading her royal mistress to patronize Columbus. This was the same Marchioness de Moya, who during the war of Granada, while the Court and Royal Army were encamped before Malaga, was mistaken for the queen by a Moorish fanatic, and had nearly fallen beneath his dagger. Her niece partook of her high and generous nature. She refused to remain behind in selfish security, but declared that she would accompany her husband in every peril, whether by sea or land. This self-devotion is the more remarkable when it is considered that she was past the romantic period of youth; and that she left behind her in Spain, a family of four sons and four daughters."

Washington Irving, *Companions of Columbus*, pp. 197-198.

17

His name was Micer Codro.

The reader will find an account of Codro in *Companions of Columbus*, pp. 260-261. But the author does not state the cause of the old astrologer's punishment. I have here followed Wilmer's account very closely.

18

I learned that Codro once in bygone years
Had cast Balboa's horoscope.

For an account of the casting of Balboa's horoscope by Codro, see *Companions of Columbus*, Life of Balboa, p. 238.

19

With knightliness superb,
They shall face terrors that the knights of old
Had viewed with startled eyes.

The martyrs to science in our own days have shown by their heroic sufferings and deaths that the spirit of true chivalry is still a vital force in the world of men. We read nearly every day of the loss of some brave adventurer who in his airship seeks to conquer the skies. The researches into the nature and uses of the X-rays have wrecked many a life, either destroying it, or so afflicting it with dreadful maladies that death would be a merciful relief. Scores of other scientists have either lost their lives or become helpless invalids in the study of various diseases and their cures. None of these, however, surpassed in fortitude and heroism those true men who exposed themselves to the stings of mosquitoes, and to the foul effluvia of yellow fever, in their great effort to discover the sources of that plague. For an interesting account of this wonderful achievement and the heroic endurance

of the benefactors of mankind who took part in it, the reader may refer to the article by Joseph Bucklin Bishop, in *Scribner's Magazine* for February, 1913.

20

The points of land

Were islands green with tufts of clustering trees.

"They were then off the coast of Veragua, near the verdant isles of Zebaco, which lie at the entrance of the Gulf of Parita or Paria." *Companions of Columbus*, p. 260.

21

A cross carved on a tree

Still marks that far-off, final resting-place.

"Sometime afterwards, Oviedo, the historian, was on the island with this very pilot, who showed him the cross on the tree, and gave his honest testimony to the good character and worthy conduct of Micer Codro. Oviedo, as he regarded the nameless grave, passed the eulogium of a scholar upon the poor astrologer. 'He died,' says he, 'like Pliny, in the discharge of his duties, traveling about the world to explore the secrets of nature.' According to his account, the prediction of Micer Codro held good with respect to Valenzuela, as it had in the case of Vasco Nuñez,—the captain died within the term in which he had been summoned to appear before the tribunal of God!" *Ibid.*, p. 261, citing Oviedo, *Hist. Gen.*, xxxix., Cap. 2.

22

Sickly, half-starved, and naked save for rags,
A peasant found him, suckling from a sow.

See Prescott, *Conquest of Peru*, Book II., Ch. II., citing Gomara, *Hist. de las Ind.*, Cap. 144.

23

The kingdom of Peru then trailed along
The great Pacific waters to the south
Above eight hundred leagues.

"It extended from about the second degree north to the thirty-seventh degree of south latitude; a line, also, which describes the western boundaries of the modern republics of Equador, Peru, Bolivia and Chili." Prescott, Book I., Ch. I.

24

Their kindred creatures, the vicuñas, yield
A flesh more savory, and a silkier wool,
But never serve as beasts of burden.

These are the animals otherwise known as alpacas, from whose wool the cloth alpaca is woven.

25 The Inca wedded wives innumerable.

Huayna Capac was said to have been the husband of seven hundred wives and the father of three hundred children. As stated in the text, Atahualpa and Huascar were two of his sons. Prescott, Book I., Ch. I. Note, citing Garcilaso (*Com. Real.*, Parte I, Lib. 3, Cap. 19). Sarmiento, *Relacion* (ms.), Cap. 7.

26 When one King died, (so reads the chronicle,)
Four thousand human lives were sacrificed
In honor of his shade.

This king was Huayna Capac, mentioned above. Prescott quotes this statement from Sarmiento, *Relacion* (ms.), Cap. 65.

27 I was sent

To cross the sea-arm at its narrowest pass.

The reader will note that De Soto was ever at the forefront, encountering the greatest danger.

"According to the report of many persons who were there (in Peru), he (De Soto) distinguished himself over all the captains and principal persons present, not only at the seizure of Atabali-pa, lord of Peru, and in carrying the city of Cuzco, but all other places wheresoever he went and found resistance." Elvas (Ch. 1).

"And there was one very notable and memorable circumstance always related of him; that in assaults, surprises and engagements with the enemy by day, he was always the first or second, and never the third, to get to the fight with his arms; and by night he was never the second, but always the first, so that it seemed to the men that he first armed himself and then ordered the alarm to be sounded." Miss King, *De Soto and his Men in the Land of Florida*, pp. 250-251.

28 Here was the highway leading to success,—
The key to Cuzco and its golden halls!

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this discovery of the Great National Road of Peru by De Soto. Without it the Spaniards could never have surmounted the overwhelming difficulties of mountain travel before reaching Cuzco.

29 Portentous omens terrified the land.
For an account of these, see Prescott, Book III., Ch. II.
Halley's comet made an appearance about this time (1531),

and doubtless added greatly to the apprehensions of the Peruvians.

³⁰ We leaped one brook a score of feet in breadth.

This is related, by an old chronicler, of De Soto at another time. Balboa, *Hist. du Perou*, Ch. 22, cited by Prescott, Book III., Ch. IV., Note.

³¹ So now the peerless ransom all was ours.

"The total amount of gold (paid in Atahualpa's ransom) was found to be one million, three hundred and twenty-six thousand, five hundred and thirty-nine *pesos de oro*, which, allowing for the greater value of money in the sixteenth century, would be equivalent, probably, at the present time to near *three millions and a half of pounds sterling*, or somewhat less than *fifteen millions and a half of dollars*. The quantity of silver was estimated at fifty-one thousand, six hundred and ten marks. History affords no parallel of such a booty. * * *

"The share appropriated by Pizarro amounted to fifty-seven thousand, two hundred and twenty-two pesos of gold, and two thousand, three hundred and fifty marks of silver. He had besides this the great chair or throne of the Inca, of solid gold, and valued at twenty-five thousand *pesos de oro*. To his brother Hernando were paid thirty-one thousand and eighty pesos of gold, and two thousand three hundred and fifty marks of silver. De Soto received seventeen thousand seven hundred and forty pesos of gold, and seven hundred and twenty-four marks of silver." Prescott, Book III., Ch. VII.

J. S. C. Abbott, in his life of De Soto, p. 118, estimates that De Soto's share of the ransom amounted to about half a million dollars of our money.

This immense treasure was only a part of the spoils of conquest. It was greatly augmented by later acquisitions.

³² Now a great comet, startling earth and heaven,
Amidst the black recesses of the night
Blazed with a weird, portentous brilliancy.

See Prescott, Book III., Ch. VII.

³³ I sought Pizarro.

"A day or two after these tragic events, Hernando De Soto returned from his excursion. Great was his astonishment and

indignation at learning what had been done during his absence. He sought out Pizarro at once, and he found him, says the chronicler, 'with a great felt hat, by way of mourning, slouched over his eyes,' and in his dress and demeanor exhibiting all the show of sorrow. 'You have acted rashly,' said De Soto to him bluntly; 'Atahualpa has been basely slandered. There was no enemy at Huamachuco; no rising among the natives. I have met with nothing on the road but demonstrations of good will, and all is quiet. If it was necessary to bring the Inca to trial, he should have been taken to Castile and judged by the emperor. I would have pledged myself to see him safe on board the vessel.' Pizarro confessed that he had been precipitate, and said that he had been deceived by Riquelme, Valverde, and the others. These charges soon reached the ears of the treasurer and the Dominican, who, in their turn, exculpated themselves. The dispute ran high; and the parties were heard by the bystanders to give one another the lie!" Prescott, Book III., Ch. VII., citing Oviedo, *Hist. de las Indias*, Parte 3, Lib. 8, Cap. 22.

Abbott gives this somewhat highly-colored account of the meeting between De Soto and Pizarro (*Life of De Soto*, pp. 116-17-18)

"De Soto soon returned. He was almost frantic with indignation when he learned of the crime which had been perpetrated in his absence, and perceived that his mission was merely an artifice to get him out of the way. His rage blazed forth in the most violent reproaches. Hastening to the tent of Pizarro, he rudely pushed aside a sentinel who guarded the entrance, and found the culprit seated on a low stool, affecting the attitude of a mourner. A large slouched hat was bent over his eyes.

"'Uncover yourself,' said De Soto, 'unless you are ashamed to look a human being in the face.' Then with the point of his sword he struck off his hat, exclaiming:

"'Is it not enough that I have disgraced myself in the eyes of the world by becoming your companion and confederate, making myself accessory to your crimes, and protecting you from the punishment you deserve? Have you not heaped infamy enough upon me, without dishonoring me by the violation of my pledges, and exposing me to the suspicion of being connected with the most cruel and causeless murder that ever set human laws and divine justice at defiance? I have ascertained, what you well knew before I left Caxamarca, that the report of the insurrection

was utterly false. I have met nothing on the road but demonstrations of good will. The whole country is quiet, and Atahualpa has been basely slandered. You, Francisco Pizarro, are his slanderer, and you are his murderer.

“To prove that I have had no participation in the deed, I will make you accountable for his death. Craven and prevaricating villain as you are, you shall not escape this responsibility. If you refuse to meet me in honorable combat, I will denounce you to the king of Spain as a criminal, and will proclaim you to the whole world as a coward and an assassin.”

“Pizarro was both, an assassin and a coward. He stood in awe of his intrepid lieutenant. He did not dare to meet him in a personal rencontre, and he well knew that De Soto was not a man to be taken by force or guile, as he could immediately rally around him the whole body of his well-drilled dragoons. He therefore began to make excuses, admitted that he had acted hastily, and endeavored to throw the blame upon others, declaring that by their false representations they had forced him to the act.

“In the midst of the dispute, Pizarro’s brothers—for there were two in the camp—entered the tent. De Soto, addressing the three, said:

“‘I am the champion of Atahualpa. I accuse Francisco Pizarro of being his murderer.’ Then throwing his glove upon the floor, he continued:

“‘I invite any man who is disposed to deny that Francisco Pizarro is a coward and an assassin, to take it up.’

“The gauge remained untouched. De Soto turned upon his heel contemptuously, and left the tent, resolved, it is said, no longer to have any connection whatever with such perfidious wretches.”

34

I plunged

Down with my courser in the chilly waves.

In relating this episode and that of the meeting between De Soto and the young Peruvian nobleman, I have mainly followed Wilmer’s account.

35

Vast riches here were ours.

The Spaniards entered Cuzco on November 13, 1533. For a description of the treasures found there by the Spaniards, and the subsequent depreciation of silver and gold, see Prescott, Book III., Ch. VIII.

36 Even lackeys and postillions hoarded wealth.

"It is said that after one-fifth (of the spoil) had been subtracted for the Spanish crown, and the officers had received their abundant shares, the common soldiers, four hundred and eighty in number, received each a sum amounting to four thousand dollars." Abbott, *Life of De Soto*, p. 136.

37 We had no iron; so our steeds were shod
In silver wrenched from fanes and palaces.

"Even silver, for the time, appeared to be unimportant. Soto had already shodden with it the horses of his troops. Of the precious stones, they who wished took what most pleased them." Buckingham Smith, *Life of De Soto*.

38 "For dead men never bite."

These were his own words, according to Prescott. The expression of Pizarro, "All countries west of Flanders are mine own," quoted later in this book, is also authentic, according to the same authority.

39 The priest Valverde next was called to go.

In relating the facts concerning the deaths of the various conquerors of Peru, I have taken some liberties with regard to the time of their occurrence, though as to the facts themselves I have followed history in nearly all details.

40 Aroused, the monarch sent a martial priest,
The valiant-hearted Gasca, to Peru.

Pedro de la Gasca was a man of eminent abilities, with a character for beneficence and wisdom rarely united in one person. Prelates like Valverde were by no means the sole exemplars of the priesthood of Spain in their day. The name of the noble and humane Las Casas would be an adornment to any order of men.

Prescott closes his *Conquest of Peru* with this eloquent tribute to Gasca: "With the benevolent mission of Gasca, then, the historian of the conquest may be permitted to terminate his labors,—with feelings not unlike those of the traveler who, having long journeyed among the dreary forests and dangerous defiles of the mountains, at length emerges on some pleasant landscape smiling in tranquillity and peace."

41 The Portuguese, Vasconcelos.

This was Andre de Vasconcelos, concerning whom many things

have been written, and with many of those things based on error. In Appleton's *Cyclopædia of American Biography* we read of him as follows:

"He was an expert mariner, and sailed in 1538 in the expedition of Hernando De Soto as Captain of the *Buena Fortuna*. After the landing of Soto at Tampa, Vasconcelos explored the coast as far as the bay of Appalachee, where he landed the rest of his stores, and when Soto went into winter quarters in 1539, Vasconcelos sailed around the coast of Florida, taking astronomical observations, and landing often to explore the country. On his return to Appalachee, he found the Adelantado gone, sailed for Cuba, thence to Europe, where he wrote an account of his voyage," etc.

Doubtless the book here referred to is that of the Portuguese Gentleman, already mentioned. Its author was a native of Elvas, and the book was first published at Evora, Portugal, in 1557.

The name of this writer is unknown, but it could not have been Vasconcelos, since he followed De Soto in all his wanderings over America, and died shortly after De Soto in an Indian province situated probably in what is now western Louisiana. For a full account of the Elvas book, see Justin Winsor's *Narrative and Critical History of America*, vol. ii., pp. 288-289. Vasconcelos is also made to figure extensively, this time in an avowed work of fiction—the novel *Vasconcelos*, by William Gilmore Simms.

43

One of those whose eyes

Had seen that Kingdom, Alvar Nuñez, came

During these days before the Spanish Court.

The real name of Cabeza de Vaca ("Cow's head") was Alvar Nuñez. Although a weaver of marvelous fables, he actually encountered most wonderful adventures, and endured terrible privations, in America.

43

Now I became a marquis at the hands

Of my kind sovereign, who likewise bestowed

The realms of Cuba and of Florida

Upon me as his Viceroy.

The Spanish title "Adelantado" has no exact counterpart in English; the words "Viceroy" or "Governor" describe it best.

The name "Florida" in those days designated not only the

Peninsula that it does at present, but all that great section of the Union now generally known as the "Southern States."

44 Ten fathom deep the sandy bottom shines.

"The transparency of the water, which Columbus attributed to the purity of the rivers, is the property of the ocean in these latitudes. So clear is the sea in the neighborhood of some of these islands, that in still weather the bottom may be seen, as in a crystal fountain; and the inhabitants dive down four or five fathoms in search of conchs and other shellfish which are visible from the surface. The delicate air and pure waters of these islands are among their greatest charms." Irving's *Life of Columbus*, Book IV., Ch. V., p. 191.

"In the Gulf of Mexico the extraordinary clearness of the water reveals to the astonished mariner the magnitude of its abysses, and discloses, even at the depth of thirty fathoms, the gigantic vegetation which, so far beneath the surface, is drawn forth by the attraction of a vertical sun." Alison's *History of Europe*, vol. x., p. 480-1.

45 We cast

Our anchors in a wide-extended bay.

De Soto's fleet reached Tampa Bay, Florida, on May 25, 1539.

46 We reached Ocali.

This was near the site of the modern town Ocala, which derives its name from the Indian village.

47 Through the soft verdure of those gentle scenes
Wandered great herds of red and mottled deer.

As late as 1773, Bartram notes the abundance of deer in all the South Atlantic and Gulf States. He frequently saw herds of them feeding peacefully in the same savannahs with horses or sheep or cattle belonging to the Indians or the pioneers. *Travels*, pp. 19, 56, 186, 233.

48 Upon a broad and level field we stood.
On one hand gleamed two lakes.

There are so many lakes in Florida that it is difficult to locate the place of meeting between De Soto and Vitachuco. The counties of Hernando, Sumpter, Putnam and Alachua all include places that would carry out to some extent the description of the Spanish chroniclers.

Mr. G. R. Fairbanks, the Floridian antiquary, thinks that this place was about fifteen miles west of the present site of Micanopy.

49

These last to come

Had floated round for thirty weary hours.

This is in accordance with the statement of Garcilaso. This combat waged by the natives from among the water lilies remains unique in the annals of savage warfare.

50

Another swamp we crossed.

This is generally supposed to be the great Okefinokee swamp, on the borders of Florida and Georgia.

During this time, and indeed throughout the whole expedition, Garcilaso represents one Gonzalo Sylvestre as performing prodigious feats of valor, strength and endurance. But none of the other chroniclers mention him at all, and doubtless most of his great deeds were mythical.

51

Rather than see their homes fall in our hands,
They gave them to the torch.

The patriotic Indians on many occasions thus saved their independence, as did the Russians in the burning of Moscow, three hundred years afterwards.

52

A lake they passed, where wild swans from the North
In a great flock had gathered.

"When the lake burst on our view there were the swans by hundreds, and white as rich cream, either dipping their black bills in the water, or stretching out one leg on its surface, or gently floating along. According to the Indian mode of hunting we had divided and approached the lagoon from different sides. The moment our vidette was seen, it seemed as if thousands of large, fat, and heavy swans were startled, and as they made away from him they drew towards the ambush of death; for the trees had hunters behind them, whose touch of the trigger would carry destruction among them. As the first party fired, the game rose and flew within easy distance of the party on the opposite side, when they again fired, and I saw the water covered with birds floating with their backs downwards, and their heads sunk in the water, and their legs kicking in the air. When the sport was over we counted more than fifty of these beautiful birds, whose skins were intended for the ladies in Europe. There were plenty of

geese and ducks, but no one condescended to give them a shoot. A conch was sounded, and after a while the squaws came dragging the canoe, and collecting the dead game, which was taken to the river's edge, fastened to the canoe, and before dusk we were again landed at our camping ground. I had heard of sportsmen in England who walked a whole day, and after firing a pound of powder returned in great glee bringing one partridge; and I could not help wondering what they would think of the spoil we were bearing from Swan Lake." Audubon's *Journal*.

53

He told

Of still another bay, noblest of all
Among those yet discovered.

This was Pensacola Harbor.

54

Next marched our host still farther to the North.

De Soto, after leaving the land of Apalache, which was situated in Northern Florida and Southern Georgia, proceeded in a northeasterly direction through the provinces of Capafi, Cofa and Cofaqui. The winter was probably spent in Northern Georgia.

55

The Indians' dogs they slew.

The men of De Soto's army were several times in such danger of starvation that they were forced to kill dogs for food. But sometimes the animals referred to by the Spanish chroniclers as dogs were not dogs at all. Thus Rangel (Chapter VI) speaks of "a few little dogs which were good eating. These are dogs of a small size that do not bark; and they breed them in their homes for food."

Prof. Bourne supposes that these were opossums, but they were much more probably raccoons.

56

The chiefs sent lads before them, playing flutes.

This was a common expression of welcome and salutation. Elvas, Chs. XI., XVII.

57

The fields

With wild strawberries, fragrant, sharp and sweet,
Abounded wondrously.

The Spanish chroniclers make frequent mention of these wild strawberry fields. So does Bartram (pp. 328-9, 331-6, 342-6-7). He says (pp. 342-4): "The swelling bases of the surrounding

hills fronting the meadows presented for my acceptance the fragrant red strawberry, in painted beds of many acres' surface, indeed I may safely say, many hundreds. * * * Verdant swelling knolls, profusely productive of flowers and fragrant strawberries, their rich juice dyeing my horse's feet and ankles."

58 And soon indeed we reached the land we sought.

The river on which De Soto met the lady of Cofachiqui has sometimes been supposed to be the Chattahoochee, but it was more probably the Savannah.

Pickett, in his history of Alabama, says that all Indian tradition places the town of Cofachiqui on the east bank of the Savannah, at the modern Silver Bluff, Barnwell County, South Carolina, about twenty-five miles south of Augusta, Georgia. But the country of Xualla, reached soon afterwards, is located by Mr. James Mooney in Western North Carolina, near the head of Broad River. Monette, a well-known authority in these matters, places the chief town of Cofachiqui on the peninsula at the junction of the Broad and Savannah rivers.

59 About the brook

A throng of woodland damosels they spied.

This episode is founded on an incident charmingly described by Bartram in his *Travels*, pp. 355-6.

60 Here was enlightenment exceeding far
 All else in these rude lands.

That the Indians of De Soto's time were more civilized than in later centuries appears certain. This was true particularly of the Indians of Northern and Eastern Georgia, according to Bartram in the year 1773. See his *Travels*, pp. 322-3-4, 330-2-3-5-6, 343-4, 370-79.

Deserted villages
Are left in silent solitudes forlorn
Where no man goes.

"About the place, from half a league to a league off, were large vacant towns, grown up in grass, that appeared as if no people had lived in them for a long time. The Indians said that two years before, there had been a pest in the land, and the inhabitants had moved away to other towns." Elvas, Ch. XIV.

⁶² At length we reached the temple.
Called a "Mosque" by Biedma and Ranjel.

⁶³ Twelve giant statues, carved of solid oak.
Garcilaso has a most elaborate account of the furnishings of this temple, and of the great treasures in the sepulchres.

⁶⁴ A Spanish leader, (Ayllon was his name).
There is much controversy as to the place of Ayllon's death. He was an adventurer, who, in June, 1526, set sail from Hispaniola with three ships, and made some explorations in South Carolina. He probably died in the October following. Only a few of his companions returned in safety.

⁶⁵ Within each casket beamed uncounted pearls.
This account of the finding of immense numbers of pearls has often been called in question, but there can be no doubt whatever of the essential facts. All the chroniclers agree on all the salient points of the episode.

The Portuguese Gentleman, a most careful and conscientious narrator, says (Ch. XIV) that three hundred and fifty pounds' weight of pearls were found, and the queen told De Soto that if he chose to send to some of the deserted villages and open the tombs there, "he might load all his horses with them."

Ranjel says (Ch. VI) that he himself went with De Soto into the mosque or temple, and saw uncounted treasures of pearls. He adds: "They took away from there some two hundred pounds of pearls; and when the woman chief saw that the Christians set much store by them, she said: 'Do you hold that of much account? Go to Talimeco, my village, and you will find so many that your horses cannot carry them.' The governor replied: 'Let them stay there; to whom God gives a gift, may St. Peter bless it,' and there the matter dropped."

Biedma in his official report says (p. 14): "He (De Soto) opened a mosque, in which were interred the bodies of the chief personages of that country. We took from it a quantity of pearls, of the weight of as many as six arrobas and a half, or seven,"—about one hundred and sixty-five or seventy pounds.

Garcilaso says that De Soto took two arrobas (about fifty pounds) himself; that he allowed the officers of the crown to take a portion which they had already weighed in scales brought with them, and that he gave his two joined hands full to each cavalier

present. The Portuguese narrator adds that some of the pearls were carved into figures of birds and little children. Biedma says that some were injured by being buried in the ground, or coming in contact with the adipose substance of the dead.

Throughout the entire region in which Cofachiqui was probably situated, there are many shell mounds containing innumerable shells of mussels and oysters.

For an account of one of these mounds, see Sir Charles Lyell's *Second Visit to the United States*, vol. i., p. 252.

Bartram, who visited the site of Silver Bluff in 1776, makes this statement in his *Travels* (pp. 315-16):

"Before I leave Augusta, I shall recite a curious phenomenon, which may furnish ample matter for philosophical discussion to the curious naturalists. On the Georgia side of the river, about fifteen miles below Silver Bluff, the high road crosses a ridge of high swelling hills of uncommon elevation, and perhaps seventy feet higher than the surface of the river. These hills, from three feet below the common vegetative surface, to the depth of twenty or thirty feet, are composed entirely of fossil oyster shells, internally of the color and consistency of clear white marble: the shells are of incredible magnitude, generally fifteen or twenty inches in length, from six to eight wide, and two to four in thickness, and their hollows sufficient to receive an ordinary man's foot: they appear all to have been opened before the period of petrification, a transmutation they seem evidently to have suffered; they are undoubtedly very ancient or perhaps antediluvian. The adjacent inhabitants burn them to lime for building, for which purpose they serve very well; and would undoubtedly afford an excellent manure when their lands require it, these hills being now remarkably fertile. The heaps of shells lie upon a stratum of a yellowish sandy mould, of several feet in depth, upon a foundation of soft white rocks, that has the outward appearance of free-stone, but on strict examination is really a testaceous concrete or composition of sand and pulverized sea shells: in short, this testaceous rock approaches near in quality and appearance to the Bahama or Bermudian white rock."

Jones in his *Antiquities of the Southern Indians* devotes the whole of Chapter IX. to these shell mounds. He likewise devotes the whole of Chapter XXI. to a discussion of the use of pearls as ornaments among the Southern Indians. He quotes from many authorities and treats the subject in a most elaborate manner.

Without going into his statement at length we will quote his summary of the facts on pages 478 and 479:

"Without multiplying these references, we think sufficient historical evidence has been adduced to satisfy the mind of the candid inquirer, and that beyond all reasonable doubt, that pearls were in general use among the Southern Indians; that the choicest of them were the prized ornaments of the prominent personages of the tribes; that the fluviatile mussels of various streams were constantly and extensively collected and opened for the purpose of procuring these gems, which, when obtained, were often pierced by means of heated copper spindles; that the marine shells of the Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico, and of the Pacific, yielded generous and beautiful tribute to the labor, skill, and taste of numerous and well-trained pearl-divers; and that these gems were found not only in the possession of the living, but also in large quantities in the graves of chieftains and the sepulchres of the undisturbed dead. We are assured, moreover, of the eagerness with which the Spaniards sought after and preserved these treasures; and more than once do we hear expressions of disappointment at the discoloration and deterioration of the pearls caused by the action of fire, and their having been pierced. A present of pearls from the caciques to the conquerors was an earnest token of consideration and the most acceptable pledge of friendship."

Added to this overwhelming evidence of the early chroniclers, and the researches of later travelers and antiquarians, we have the weight of recent discoveries. A number of East Tennessee rivers in recent years have been producing pearls of a very superior quality. That region has become the center of a thriving and profitable pearl fishery. De Soto's men gave accounts of these gems being found in a river which has since been well identified as the Tennessee. Pearls are now obtained in the headwaters of this stream.

The chroniclers speak of finding pearls among the Indians of eastern Arkansas. These statements were doubted till within the last twenty years, when many of these gems began to be discovered in the streams of that region. Eastern Arkansas is now the seat of a flourishing trade in pearls. Great heaps of shells are found imbedded in earth along these rivers, indicating that the Indians once rifled them of their treasures.

If the number of the gems is not as great as formerly, the fact is easily explainable when we remember that many were buried

with the dead, and thus became lost, while the supply of fresh-water pearls is speedily exhausted in the opening and throwing away of thousands of shells at a time, which would bring about the extinction of the bivalves within them.

Subsequent developments have proved the truth of many a narrative previously doubted. Witness the Homeric legend of the Pigmies, verified in our own day; witness the strange stories of Marco Polo, once ridiculed, now accepted. Mendez-Pinto has been celebrated both by Congreve and by Poe as the prince of fabricators. But we now know that the account of his romantic wanderings is substantially true. The narrative of Father Marquette, the explorer of the upper Mississippi country, was scoffed at for fifty years after his death; but we now know him to be one of the most truthful of all the early adventurers.

Those who are interested in such matters will find an elaborate article by Dr. Harry Thurston Peck on the subject of accounts of discoveries once discredited, but finally corroborated, in *Munsey's Magazine* for January, 1910.

66

"Arouse, my Lord!" he cried,
"For on this morn my comrade, Nimble Foot,
Weds with the queen."

There are many stories related of the queen by the chroniclers, Garcilaso offering some which are doubtless mythical. The gentleman of Elvas says that she married the attendant of Vasconcelos, and he being our most reliable authority, his statement is, I doubt not, correct.

67

The country of Xualla next we reached.

This was probably East Tennessee or Western North Carolina. The mountain range was the Blue Ridge.

68

The lowlands next we reached.

This was in Northern Alabama. After leaving Xualla, the Spaniards traversed Guaxule, a land of abundance, where they reveled in good living. From there they went to Chiaha, a village where they were in like manner well received.

69

Never before

Had we seen honey in Floridian wilds.

The honey brought to De Soto must have been made by swarms of honeybees migrating from the South, for the little insect was

not indigenous to America, but was first brought to the West Indies and Mexico by the Spaniards. There were then, as now, however, many varieties of stingless bees, not related to our honeybee, in Central and South America.

70

A noble stream, far ampler than the rest.

From the description of this river it is difficult to imagine what stream could have been referred to except the Tennessee.

"The width of some of the streams, the number and extent of their islands, and the names of some of the villages and other localities mentioned in the accounts given of De Soto's marches, have led to the belief that he may have visited the southern part of what is now East Tennessee, and that then turning west he crossed and recrossed the Tennessee river.* * *

"Col. Pettival, who had been in the service of Napoleon during the Peninsular War, and was therefore familiar with Spanish fortifications, visited in 1834, two forts or camps on the west bank of the Tennessee river, one mile above Brown's Ferry, below the muscle shoals and opposite the mouth of Cedar Creek (the county not mentioned), which certainly belong to the expedition of De Soto. He promises in the letter from which this extract is made, a plan and description of these fortifications. He died soon after, and the writer is without further information on the subject." Ramsey's *Annals of Tennessee*, pp. 26-7.

Along this river the Indians had extensive pearl fisheries. Many canoes were sent out to gather shells. Great fires were kindled; the shells were thrown upon the coals, and when they would open the Indians would thrust their fingers between them and extract the pearls.

71

Among the forest princes greeting us
Coosa reigned paramount.

The State of Alabama has numerous places recalling De Soto's expedition by their names. A river and a county are named for Coosa: a county and a town are named for Tuscaloosa, and also a river, the Black Warrior,—Tuscaloosa meaning "Black Warrior" in Choctaw. The city of Mobile, of course, is named for Maubila.

72

A giant monarch, Tuscaloosa.

"Another province, called Taszalua, of which an Indian of such size was chief that we all considered him a giant." (Biedma.)

"He was as tall as that Tony of the emperor, our lord's guard. He had a son, a young man as tall as himself, but more slender." Ranjel, Ch. VII.

Garcilaso is authority for the statement that the heads of tallest men only reached the breast of the son.

73

We reached Maubila.

Biedma says (p. 21) that Maubila was forty leagues from the sea, but whether this was counted from the Gulf itself or the northern shore of Mobile Bay, does not appear. Pickett thinks that the village was at a place called Choctaw Bluff, in Clarke County (Southwestern Alabama), upon the northern bank of the Alabama River, about twenty-five miles above the junction of that river with the Tombigbee.

74

It still was early morning.

The battle of Maubila was fought October 18, 1540.

75

If the cage be hung

Without the walls, the elders then will come

With poisonous berries in their beaks.

The story that mocking-birds will feed poisonous berries to their young when caged, has sometimes been asserted as a fact by persons of veracity, although I have never been able to confirm the truth of such a statement. However, conceding it to be a fable, like that other myth of the pelican feeding her young from her own bosom, it teaches a higher truth than many prosaic facts.

76

With some favored peers

He speeded from the town, and in the wilds

Purchased his safety through inglorious flight.

"The Indians, observing how he (De Soto), was going on arranging his man, urged the Cacique (Tuscaloosa) to leave, telling him, as was afterwards made known by some women who were taken in the town, that as he was but one man, and could fight but as one only, there being many chiefs present very skilful and experienced in matters of war, any one of whom was able to command the rest, and as things in war were so subject to fortune, that it was never certain which side would overcome the other, they wished him to put his person in safety; for if they should conclude their lives there, on which they had resolved rather than

surrender, he would remain to govern the land: but for all that they said, he did not wish to go, until, from being continually urged, with fifteen or twenty of his own people, he went out of the town, taking with him a scarlet cloak and other articles of the Christians' clothing, being whatever he could carry and that seemed best to him." Elvas, Ch. XIX.

Persistent efforts have been made in recent times to show that Tuscaloosa died a heroic death with his subjects. Wilmer (pp. 436-40) has a grandiose account of a meeting between De Soto and Tuscaloosa, on the field of battle, and concludes by alleging that Tuscaloosa threw himself into a burning building, thus perishing. All these statements are purely imaginary. The Portuguese narrator has evidently given the facts. Ranzel says "Whether the chief was dead or alive was never known." But Tuscaloosa, according to all accounts, was a giant; he had, besides, been with the Spaniards many days before the battle, and must have been well known to all of them by sight. Yet not only was his body not discovered after the battle, but no one claims to have seen him from the beginning to the end of the combat. A man as well known as he, and as conspicuous for stature, would surely have been noted. It is no answer to these facts to say that the chroniclers were biased. The Portuguese narrator had no Spanish national pride to move him. Ranzel was poisoned with malevolence against De Soto, blaming him and siding with Tuscaloosa in his version of their dispute. All the Spanish histories of the expedition are replete with commendations of the valor displayed by the Indians on this, as on many another battle-field. Maubila was a Thermopylæ, but Tuscaloosa was not a Leonidas.

77 Still standing in my stirrups, doggedly
 I fought, despite mine anguish, to the end.

This episode, as well as that at the battle of Chickasaw, where De Soto fought for hours on horseback after his saddle-girth had broken, is well attested by the chroniclers. As noted before, De Soto was one of the most accomplished horsemen of his time.

78 Three thousand of the Paynim dead we found.

Garcilaso says that eleven thousand Indians perished. Ranzel says that there were three thousand dead, not counting many others who were wounded, and whom they afterwards found dead

in the cabins and along the roads. The Portuguese narrator says, "They who perished were in all two thousand five hundred, a few more or less."

Garcilaso says that Moscoso and his division remained behind previous to entering Maubila, and did not join in the battle till late that afternoon. This must be an error, as no other historian corroborates the assertion, and Ranjel says positively that he himself was present at the beginning of the battle, and Moscoso took part from its very inception.

79

To a slave I threw my gear,
And took his own for mine.

"Learning that the spirit of mutiny was abroad in the camp, he (De Soto) went among the men disguised as one of them, and realizing how disaffected they were fast becoming, resolved on another movement north. * * * He had become reckless. * * *

"To return to Cuba was to confess defeat, to court disgrace, to end his days in poverty." Keating's *History of Memphis*, p. 20.

80

We resumed our march,
And reached thine own dominions.

De Soto left Maubila in November, and proceeding northwest, reached the village of the Chickasaws on December 17th following. He crossed two rivers on the way (one of them being the Tombigbee) and at both of these he had great difficulties in building boats for crossing. He was also opposed by the Indians at each of the streams, and had serious skirmishes with them, but on arriving at the Chickasaw town was received with open-hearted hospitality.

81

Suddenly the youth
Among the leafless forest trees beheld
A vast green flock of parrots.

These once roved the country in great numbers, but are now nearly extinct.

"It (the Carolina parrot) is also restricted to the warmer parts of the Union, rarely venturing beyond the State of Virginia. West of the Alleghenies, however, circumstances induce these birds commonly to visit much higher latitudes; so that, following

the great valley of the Mississippi, they are seen to frequent the banks of the Illinois, and occasionally to approach the southern shores of Lake Michigan. Straggling parties even have sometimes been seen in the valley of the Juniata in Pennsylvania, and a flock, to the great surprise of the Dutch inhabitants of Albany, are said to have appeared in that vicinity. They constantly inhabit and breed in the Southern States, and are so far hardy as to make their appearance, commonly in the depth of winter, along the woody banks of the Ohio, the interior of Alabama, the banks of the Mississippi and Missouri around St. Louis, and other places, when nearly all other birds have migrated before the storms of the season. * * *

"I fear that the story of this gorgeously appareled bird is nearly finished. It is not quite exterminated yet, but of the large flocks that were once seen all over the Southern States, only a mere remnant can be found, and these are hidden amid the dense swamps of Central Florida and along the lower valley of the Mississippi. The farmers and fruit-growers were obliged to kill large numbers."—Nuttall's *Birds of the United States and Canada*, (Ed. 1903), vol. i., pp. 428-9-31.

Nuttall's book, from which the first part of the above statements is quoted, originally appeared in 1834, and it speaks of that date. The last paragraph is a note by Montague Chamberlain in the edition of 1903.

8:

"The bird

Thou gavest me is tamed."

"The Carolina parrot is readily tamed, and early shows an attachment to those around who bestow any attention to its wants; it soon learns to recollect its name and to answer and come when called on. * * *

"One which I saw at Tuscaloosa, a week after being disabled in the wing, seemed perfectly reconciled to its domestic condition, and as the weather was remarkably cold, it remained the greater part of the time in the house, climbing up the sides of the wire fender to enjoy the warmth of the fire. I was informed that when first caught, it scaled the side of the room at night, and roosted in a hanging posture by the bill and claws; but finding the labor difficult and fruitless, having no companion near which to nestle, it soon submitted to pass the night on the back of a chair." Nuttall, vol. i., p. 431.

83

"The mother, unconcerned as though its birth
Took place a year ago, was sharpening spears,
And feathering shafts for arrows."

"When I awoke in the morning and made my rounds through the camp, I found a squaw had been delivered of beautiful twins during the night, and I saw the same squaw, at work tanning deer-skins. She had cut two vines at the roots of opposite trees, and made a cradle of bark, in which the new-born ones were wafted to and fro with a push of her hand, while from time to time she gave them the breast, and was apparently as unconcerned as if the event had not taken place." Audubon's *Journal*.

84

"This is Indian night."

These were De Soto's exact words.

85

The Indian maiden, Lulla, sang a song.

The first two lyrics in this book are free renditions, or rather paraphrases, of two Ojibway songs, literally translated in Schoolcraft's work on the Indian tribes (Philadelphia, 1855), Part V., pp. 611-12.

86

Year by year,

The red men of this country, at the close
Of Autumn, when the dead leaves quivering down,
Had strewn knee-deep the sod, would give to flames
The dry brown rustling waste of foliage.

There are persons yet living who remember the time when the Indians still occupied this part of the country. The Chickasaws migrated to the Indian Territory (now Oklahoma), in 1838. Prior to this time the country was in well-nigh the same condition as in De Soto's era. From conversations with these old pioneers I have drawn the facts used in description of this scene of De Soto's march. From Bartram (pp. 149-50), we learn that the Indians of Florida burned the forest leaves each year in the same manner.

87

Nonconnah—"Long Stream" of the Indians.

Nonconnah River is about seven miles south of the present site of Memphis, Tennessee. I was informed by an old pioneer that Nonconnah means "Long Stream" in Chickasaw.

Looking up, they saw

Flocks of wild pigeons multitudinous,
Swarming like locusts in the Libyan skies.

These birds, now nearly extinct, once moved in flocks incredibly immense.

"The associated numbers of Wild Pigeons, the numerous flocks which compose the general swarm, are without any other parallel in the history of the feathered race; they can indeed alone be compared to the finny shoals of herrings, which, descending from the Arctic regions, discolor and fill the ocean to the extent of mighty kingdoms. * * * The approach of the mighty feathered army with a loud rushing roar and a stirring breeze, attended by a sudden darkness, might be mistaken for a fearful tornado about to overwhelm the face of Nature. For several hours together the vast host, extending some miles in breadth, still continues to pass in flocks without diminution. The whole air is filled with birds; * * * they shut out the light as if it were an eclipse. At the approach of the hawk their sublime and beautiful aerial evolutions are disturbed like a ruffling squall extending over the placid ocean; as a thundering torrent they rush together in a concentrating mass, and heaving in undulating and glittering sweeps towards the earth, at length again proceed in lofty meanders like the rushing of a mighty animated river. * * *

"In the Atlantic States, where the flocks are less abundant, the gun, decoy, and net are put in operation against the devoted throng. Twenty or even thirty dozen have been caught at a single sweep of the net. Wagonloads of them are poured into market, where they are sometimes sold for no more than a cent apiece. * * * The Honorable T. H. Perkins remarks that about the year 1798, while he was passing through New Jersey, near Newark, the flocks continued to pass for at least two hours without cessation; and he learnt from the neighboring inhabitants that in descending upon a large pond to drink, those in the rear, alighting on the backs of the first that arrived (in the usual order of their movements on land to feed), pressed them beneath the surface, so that tens of thousands were thus drowned. They were likewise killed in great numbers at the roosts with clubs." Nuttall, vol. ii., pp. 3, 4, 6.

Audubon estimated the number of birds in one of these flocks at eleven hundred millions, and calculated that they would require more than eight millions of bushels of seeds and grains

for food each day. Another flock seen by Wilson was greater still. He judged them in flight, to extend over two hundred and forty miles. He concluded that they must have numbered more than twenty-two hundreds of millions, and consumed above seventeen millions of bushels of seeds and grains daily.

8,

Here they beheld

The nesting place.

"As the sun begins to decline, they depart in a body for the *general roost*, which is often hundreds of miles distant, and is generally chosen in the tallest and thickest forests, almost divested of underwood. Nothing can exceed the waste and desolation of these nocturnal resorts. * * * The tall trees for thousands of acres are completely killed, and the ground strewn with massy branches torn down by the clustering weight of the birds which have rested upon them. The whole region for several years presents a continued scene of devastation, as if swept by the resistless blast of a whirlwind. * * *

"The *breeding places*, as might naturally be expected, differ from the *roosts* in their greater extent. In 1807, according to Wilson, one of these immense nurseries, near Shelbyville, in Kentucky, was several miles in breadth and extended through the woods for upwards of forty miles. * * * Wilson often counted upwards of ninety nests in a single tree, and the whole forest was filled with them. * * * But their most destructive enemy is man; and as soon as the young are fully grown, the neighboring inhabitants assemble and encamp for several days around the devoted pigeons with wagons, axes, and cooking utensils, like the outskirts of a destructive army. The perpetual tumult of the birds, the crowding and fluttering multitudes, the thundering roar of their wings, and the crash of falling trees, from which the young are thus precipitated to the ground by the axe, produces altogether a scene of indescribable and almost terrific confusion. It is dangerous to walk beneath these clustering crowds of birds, from the frequent descent of large branches broken down by the congregating millions; the horses start at the noise, and conversation can only be heard in a shout."

To the foregoing extract from Nuttall's book is appended the following note:

"The most important of recent contributions to the biography of this species is Mr. William Brewster's article in *The Auk* for

October, 1889. He tells there of a 'nesting' in Michigan in 1877 that covered an area twenty-eight miles long and three to four miles wide, and says: 'For the entire distance of twenty-eight miles every tree of any size had more or less nests, and many trees were filled with them.'" Nuttall's *Birds of the United States and Canada*, vol. ii., pp. 4, 5, 7.

90 "Road of the Pigeon Roost" this way was called.

The Pigeon Roost Road still bears that name, and is probably the oldest and most important highway leading to the city of Memphis. It extends from that place in a southeasterly direction through North Mississippi.

91 They reached a village (Chisca it was called).

The village of Chisca was at the present site of Memphis.

The Portuguese narrator and Biedma call this town Quizquiz. Ranjel calls it Quizqui. All of these names are probably variations of the word Chicaza or Chickasaw, the name of the tribe itself.

92 Beyond the village rose two lofty mounds.

These two Indian mounds still overlook the river at Memphis. They have recently been purchased by the city authorities, the grounds enclosing them being known as De Soto Park.

93 High on a bluff they stood: anear its base
The Mississippi rolled his mighty flood.

The Great River was discovered in May, 1541. The exact date is unknown, but it was within two or three days before May 21st.

"The Spaniards were guided to the Mississippi by the natives; and were directed to one of the usual crossing-places, probably at the lowest Chickasaw bluff, not far from the thirty-fifth parallel of latitude." Bancroft, *History of the United States*.

Keating, in his history of Memphis (p. 21), says that the village of Chisca was near the high mound which overlooks the river, where it divides to flow southward on either side of what is now known as "President's Island."

Some have contended that the location of Chisca was in North Mississippi. But there is no mound on the east side of the river south of the Chickasaw bluffs, and the chroniclers tell us that the chief's wigwam was built on such a mound.

Again, going southward from the Chickasaw bluffs, there are

no other bluffs facing the river for at least one hundred and fifty miles. The country is quite low, and must have overflowed nearly every year in De Soto's time. Hence, no permanent village could have been situated there.

"Their (*i. e.* the Chickasaws') main landing place on the Mississippi was at the Chickasaw bluffs, now the site of Memphis, Tenn., whence a trail more than 160 miles long led to their villages." *Bulletin Bureau of American Ethnology*, No. 30, Part 1, p. 260.

It is only fair to presume that Chisca, the chief town of the Chickasaws on the river, was at this main landing-place.

But the river has been persistently encroaching upon the bluffs at Memphis, and it is possible that in the time of De Soto the mounds and village were a mile or more east of the river, the stream then flowing through the channel now known as "Four-mile Bayou," or the one called "Marion Lake." This is rendered still more probable from the fact that although De Soto visited the Chief upon the mound, it does not appear that he saw the river from that elevation. At this day it would be almost at his feet.

The Mississippi is constantly changing its course. Along its meanderings throughout the Southern States are numerous lakes, nearly all being in the shape of horse-shoes, or crescents, with the horns of the arcs invariably turned toward the river, and having small streams connecting with the river, in rainy seasons, from each tip. Doubtless all these lakes are segments of the ancient river-bed. In times of flood, before levees were built, steamboats readily went through the woods along the line of the old stream, from Memphis to the village of Marion in Arkansas. In dry seasons this route of the steamers is only a dusty country highway.

94

This river with his name
Would be entwined forever.

It has become quite a pastime in our era to attempt to show that this or that discoverer or inventor is not really entitled to the credit heretofore given him for some achievement. In accordance with this idea, it has been contended by some that Alonzo de Pineda, sailing along the gulf-coast in 1519, discovered the mouth of the Mississippi, and that Cabeza de Vaca in 1528, going from Florida, crossed it at some point near which the river enters the gulf. Speaking first of the claim regarding Pineda, we would say

that the Mississippi does not enter the gulf in one stream. It has three main outlets, and a multitude of lesser arteries, by which it empties into the sea. These various outlets so diffuse the waters of the stream that no one of them is larger than several other streams which Pineda could have observed along his way. Thus we have no means whatever of distinguishing the Mississippi from a number of other rivers which he might have seen.

John Gilmary Shea, in Justin Winsor's *Narrative and Critical History of America*, advocates the claim of Pineda, but in the very statement of the case gives the best answer to it. He says, (vol. ii., p. 237) that Pineda "found a river of great volume, evidently the Mississippi. * * * He ran up the river, and found it so thickly inhabited that in a space of six leagues he counted no fewer than forty Indian hamlets on the banks. According to their report, the land abounded in gold, as the natives wore gold ornaments in their noses and ears, and other parts of the body."

In the first place, the valley near the mouths of the Mississippi at that day, as now, was a region of immense swamps, subject to constant overflows. Even now, with an elaborate system of levees, it is but sparsely settled. At that time it was only a vast wild marshland, well nigh without inhabitants.

Again, all the lower Mississippi Valley is of alluvial soil, and no gold is to be found within hundreds of miles of the lower river itself.

The description given by Pineda could well have fitted the Rio Grande, as it ran through a well-settled country, with gold mines at no great distance from its banks.

As to Cabeza de Vaca, Shea in this same article (page 244), shows that he did not cross the river at all, but that his vessel, after skirting along the coast, was wrecked either in *Western Louisiana or Eastern Texas*, beyond the mouths of the Mississippi.

In Cabeza's own narrative no mention is made of any stream that can be identified as the Mississippi.

But De Soto's discovery was unequivocal, and it first brought the stream to the attention of the civilized world. Columbus was not more surely the discoverer of America, preceded as he was by the half-legendary exploits of Leif Ericson.

Grande, and the name given by De Soto was never accepted by the world. As stated before in these notes, the Indians living on the banks of the river itself called it the Chucagua.

In the preface to this book, I call attention to the fact that the discovery of the Mississippi in 1541 connects the history of the Mississippi Valley with the years of the Renaissance in Europe. I also mention a number of historical characters living at that time, or near it. Since that time, in reading Mark Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*, Chapter I, I have found a similar statement, and a similar reference to various historical characters living at or near that period.

My preface was first written in January, 1909, and at that time I had not read the older book. But the coincidence is a natural one, since any writer giving close attention to the subject would sooner or later be struck with this unique feature of our country's history.

The distinguished author of *Life on the Mississippi* was slightly in error in placing the date of the discovery in 1542. He says that at this time "Michael Angelo's paint was not yet dry on the *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel."

As stated in the preface to this book, the great painter was still engaged on the work in May, 1541, the time of the discovery. The painting was first exhibited to the public on Christmas day, 1541.

96

These never-daunted men
Have conquered dizzy amplitudes of air,
And proved themselves the Vikings of the skies.

The Wright brothers, the real inventors of the aeroplane, were both born and reared in the Mississippi Valley. It is unnecessary to add here that, among all martyrs to the science of aerial navigation, none went to their fate more fearlessly than those of our own land.

97

The people of this late-discovered land
Have builded highways of engirding steel.

The railroad through the Andes, the highest in altitude, I believe, of all in the world, and probably the greatest achievement of railway engineering known at the present, is the result of the skill, daring and perseverance of men whom we are proud to claim as our countrymen.

98 First they marched north, then later ventured west.

De Soto for some time followed the course of the Mississippi north, and probably reached that part of the State of Missouri which extends like a peninsula into the northeastern section of Arkansas.

"In ascending the Mississippi the party was often obliged to wade through morasses. At length they came, as it would seem, upon the district of Little Prairie, and the dry and elevated lands which extend towards New Madrid." Bancroft.

Many of these "dry and elevated lands" are now great sunken wastes of swamps and marshes, where the landmarks of De Soto's expedition have been destroyed. In the winter of 1811-12, a series of terrific earthquakes occurred throughout this region. This part of the country being then very sparsely inhabited by white people, the catastrophe is not well-known in history, but it was undoubtedly one of the most powerful disturbances of nature which mankind has ever witnessed. Vast regions of uplands were depressed into flooded swamps, and on the Tennessee side of the river, Reelfoot Lake, a body of water some twenty-five or thirty miles long, and five to ten miles wide, was formed through a great convulsion of the earth as though in the rending of chaos at the dawn of creation. On account of the effects of this earthquake it is difficult at this day to trace De Soto's route through that region.

99 Here waterfowl came flocking; here were fish
So plentiful that natives slew them oft
With blows of cudgels.

Western Arkansas now, as in De Soto's time, is famous as a resort for the huntsman and the fisherman. The catfish, the shovel-bill cat, and other inhabitants of these lakes and streams are easily recognizable from the narration of the Portuguese Gentleman.

"Fish were taken, such as are now found in the fresh waters of that region; one of them, the spade fish, the strangest and most whimsical production of the muddy streams of the West, so rare that even now, it is rarely found in any museum,—is accurately described by the best historian of the expedition." Bancroft.

100 A simple tribe they reached, whose people came
Worshiping them as gods.

"The Spaniards were adored as children of the sun, and the

blind were brought into their presence to be healed by the sons of light. 'Pray only to God, who is in heaven, for whatsoever ye need,' said De Soto in reply; and the sublime doctrine which thousands of years before, had been proclaimed in the deserts of Arabia, now first found its way into the prairies of the Far West." Bancroft.

The Spaniards were also asked to make the heavens rain. Garcilaso assures us that after some prayers from the priests, the long drought was broken by a great rain which lasted three entire days!

101

Never before

Had he beheld these creatures.

The Spanish army itself never encountered any herds of bison during the entire expedition. Frequent mention is made by the historians of presents of "cowskins" and "lionskins" made to them, but the skins must have been those of bison, as there were no lions in America, and the Indians had no cows. Some soldiers, sent by De Soto into Middle Tennessee returned, says the Portuguese Gentleman, with "a cowhide as delicate as a calf-skin, the hair being like the soft wool on the cross of the merino with the common sheep."

On the borders of Southern Missouri, he continues, a chief came to visit the Spaniards, and, "as he and his men entered the camp they wept,—the token of obedience and the repentance of a past error, according to the usage of that country. He brought a present of many cowskins, which were found very useful; the country being very cold, they were taken for bed-covers, as they were very soft, and the wool like that of sheep. Near by, to the northward, are many cattle."

In northwestern Arkansas, at the village of Casqui, says Ranjel, above the door of the principal house "were many heads of very fierce bulls; just as in Spain, noblemen who are sportsmen mount the heads of wild boars or bears." The historians add that the Indians said the wild cattle were so numerous to the north that no maize could be cultivated there.

Some authorities have conjectured that since no bison were to be found in the Southern States east of the Mississippi in more recent times, none existed there in De Soto's day. But they were to be found there in his day, though in limited numbers. A legend, doubtless an exaggeration of the facts, may throw light on this:

"They (the Choctaws and Chickasaws) have a tradition of a

great drought that occurred during the early part of the eighteenth century. It was particularly severe in the prairie region. Not a drop of rain fell for three years. The Noxubee and Tombigbee rivers dried up. The forest trees perished. The elk and buffalo, then numerous, migrated beyond the Mississippi, and neither of these species returned. Towards the close of the third year it began to rain, and continued for two moons, and the Great Spirit had forgiven them." Claiborne's *History of Mississippi*, p. 484.

102

A myriad-headed plague.

The story of the vast herds of bison on the Western prairies is too well known to be repeated at any length.

Mr. Hornaday says: "Of all the quadrupeds that have ever lived upon the earth, probably no other species has ever marshaled such immense hosts as those of the American bison. * * * Even in South Central Africa, which has been exceedingly prolific in great herds of game, it is probable that all of its quadrupeds taken together on an equal area would never have more than equaled the total number of buffalo in this country forty years ago."

In 1871, Colonel Dodge, when passing through one of the great herds on the Arkansas River (which herd, indeed, was one of the last of these immense armies), and calculating that there were some fifteen or twenty bison to the acre, states from his own observation that the herd was not less than twenty-five miles wide and fifty miles long. Hornaday estimates the number of bison in this aggregation at four millions.

"Many writers at and about the date mentioned (1871) speak of the plains being absolutely black with bison as far as the eye could reach. And Mr. W. Blackmore tells of passing through a herd for a distance of one hundred and twenty miles right on end, in traveling on the Kansas Pacific Railroad. Frequently, indeed, trains on that line were derailed in attempting to pass through herds of bison, until the drivers learned it was advisable to bring their engines to a standstill when they found the line blocked in this manner." Lydecker's *Royal Natural History*, vol. ii., p. 193.

103

They observed the flight

Of parrots in a northern course.

"With that peculiar caprice, or perhaps appetite, which characterizes them (the Carolina parrots), they are also observed to frequent the saline springs, or *licks*, to gratify their uncommon taste for salt." Nuttall, vol. i., p. 430.

104

The country of the Tunicas they passed,
And reached the kingdom of the Tulas.

This was probably in Oklahoma, the western limit of the expedition. The Tunica (or Tanico) Indians were afterwards found by the white men on the banks of the Mississippi, to which they had migrated after De Soto's era. There is a county in Mississippi named for them.

Before this time, in Northern Arkansas and Southern Missouri, the Spaniards had encountered the tribes of Casqui, Pacaha, Caligoa, Coyas, and others. There were the usual skirmishes and hand-to-hand-encounters day by day.

105

Juan Ortiz, here, suddenly falling ill,
Took to his bed.

This was in the province of Autiamque, Central Arkansas. The hot springs were the celebrated Hot Springs of Arkansas, which were discovered by De Soto.

106

Twenty leagues in breadth,
Its turbid billows with resistless power
Broke down all barriers.

The Mississippi, when not restrained by levees, in the height of its great floods often attained a width of forty or fifty miles. The Spanish historians say that it attained a breadth of sixty miles at one time, and this statement is doubtless true.

107

His labors and his conflicts all were over.

He died on May 21, 1542, three years, almost to a day, from the time he had landed at Tampa, and about one year after the discovery of the Mississippi. He passed away in the dominions of Guayachoya, a friendly chief. This was in that region now East-Central Louisiana, near the junction of the Red River with the Mississippi.

108

The dying Theban.

Epaminondas, victor at Leuctra and Mantinea, who perished in the last named battle.

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